The scroll of Ruth re-told through librettos and music: biblical interpretation in a new key

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Otto Goldschmidt (b. Hamburg 1829, d. London 1907) was a pianist, conductor and composer. He studied with Mendelssohn, among others, and his music was strongly influenced by that composer’s melodic style and harmonic language. According to New Grove, the oratorio Ruth is considered Goldschmidt’s most well-known composition. He wrote it for his wife, the soprano Jenny Lind, and it “makes effective use of her famous high F# (f♯‴)” (Gaynor Jones in New Grove, vol. 10, p. 107). It was performed several times in the 19th century, in England and Germany. In standard oratorio fashion, the narration segments of the Scroll are sung by a Narrator, while the dialogue is sung by the characters. However, verses in which the narrator interrupts a dialogue are omitted, to retain the flow of the dialogues.

Chapter 1 Part I: The opening recitative is the text of 1.1-6, eliminating only Ruth’s and Orpah’s names from v. 4. Following this recitative, the chorus sings Ps. 147.7, 8 and Ps. 111.5.

These both contain references to famine and food.

In the first extended duet (1.8-17) between Ruth and Naomi [Figs. 1&2], Naomi’s further admonitions to her daughters-in-law (1.12-13) are omitted.

Figure 1: Goldschmidt, “Turn again,” no. 4, p. 26, 3rd staff, m.3

Ruth and Naomi’s first duet (Fig. 1) opens with Naomi’s solo recitative “Turn again” (1.11). The leitmotif, a series of rising 8th note arpeggios increasing in speed and volume, and a rising line of falling thirds, appears here for the first time. This leitmotif of the Ruth-Naomi

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1 Note on format of this chapter: my comments on librettos and music are all italicized; those on the music are in bold face.

2 This statement is not supported by any indication in the score; it is possible that Lind interpolated a very high note in performance and that this was mentioned in a subsequent review, from which Jones acquired his (not cited) information.
relationship is repeated before Ruth’s opening notes. Ruth’s first words are “Intreat me not” (p. 27, 2nd staff, m.7), sung twice on rising minor thirds. This leads to the lengthy aria setting of “Whither thou goest.”

Figure 2: Goldschmidt, “Whither thou goest,” no. 4, p. 28, m.4

This aria is in a faster tempo, marked Allegro con moto in 4/4 time. Naomi interrupts the aria (p. 30, top) with “Behold thy sister Orpah” (1.15, placed here after 1.16, so that Naomi is responding to Ruth’s words). The accompaniment switches abruptly to triplets. Modulations between major and minor recur frequently (from F-fm-C in the first 4 measures; p. 30), and at the climax of this section, the triplets become 16th notes. Then a variant of the leitmotif returns in the accompaniment to bring a recapitulation of the opening “Intreat me not” phrase, here marked agitato and repeated on increasingly higher pitches (p. 30, 4th staff). Ruth interrupts Naomi with this phrase, as Naomi had previously interrupted Ruth. The final repetition of the words “to leave thee” are sung on the dominant of F (C7; p. 31, 2nd staff, m.2); when it is resolved, the 16th notes stop and lead to the conclusion, to be played piu tranquillo. The section ends with both voices on the dominant C7, from which Ruth reprises “Whither thou goest.”

The rhythmic and tonal shifts throughout this scene create a sense of anxiety and uncertainty. When the two voices sing together (p. 30, 4th staff), Ruth singing “Intreat me not” against Naomi’s “Return thou,” the shift to 16th notes highlights the excitement and conflicting desires of the two women. The quality and tone of Ruth’s music is sweeter than Naomi’s, because of its smoother rhythms, brighter keys and higher pitches, musically portraying the difference in their characters.

Immediately following Ruth’s aria, the chorus sings Ps. 34.15 and Ps. 112.4.

These verses contain references to God who watches out for the righteous.

After the narrator has announced the arrival in Bethlehem of Naomi and Ruth, the chorus, described here as “People,” ask “Is this Naomi?” (1.19). After Naomi’s response (1.21), they repeat her words: “Is this Naomi, who went out full and whom the Lord brought home again empty?”

The majority of Naomi’s solos include a mixed-gender or women’s chorus. The chorus of “Is this Naomi?” (1.19; p. 45, top) is in a-minor, to be sung allegro. In this fugato, the basses begin, joined by the tenors, then by the women’s voices.

The fugal form in the chorus heightens the sense of confusion and mixed emotions experienced by the people on seeing Naomi.
The tempo increases from allegro moderato to allegro molto vivace up to Naomi’s entrance, which is introduced by the leitmotif in the accompaniment heard earlier in the duet with Ruth, but here reprised con fuoco (fiery) (p. 46, top).

The quote of the leitmotif is a musical prompt to the audience to remember the earlier exchange between Ruth and Naomi. The tempo increase serves to intensify emotion still further.

The words “Call me not Naomi” (1.20; p. 46, 2nd staff) are sung as a recitative rather than an aria, starting animato and slowing to andantino. The words “call me Mara” are sung on chromatically descending notes, with the longest held note on the first syllable of “Mara.” A short arioso (9 measures), “I went out full” (1.21; p. 46, 4th staff) follows. The melody is very similar to the one heard in “Have I yet any sons” (p. 27, top). It starts in F but the D flat in the accompaniment is part of b-flat minor, built on the 4th degree of the major. The arioso is interrupted by another choral fugato. In this recapitulation, the chorus repeats the words Naomi has just sung. Some of their music is syncopated and there is a shortened distance, within the fugato, between the entrances of the different voices.

The long note on the first syllable of the word “Mara” is almost a leading tone, and together with the minor within major harmony, creates a sighing effect. Utilizing a previously-heard melody for Naomi’s words recalls the theme of emptiness suggested earlier. The chorus’s repetition of Naomi’s words contains a sense of questioning, confusion and urgency. The use of syncopated rhythms and staggered entrances of the different voices can suggest any of these moods.

Naomi then has another short solo, “The Lord hath testified against me” (1.21; p. 48, top). At the close of the scene, the “women” sing “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5.4).

As in the previous choral interjections, these words, in addition to comforting Naomi, also reflect on the action.

Chapter 2

Though this is an oratorio (unstaged), Goldschmidt nonetheless marked this part “In the Harvest Field,” to create a sense of place. After 2.2, the chorus interjects Ps.121, 5.6, “The Lord is thy keeper.”

This seems intended to be a reassurance that Ruth is watched by God.

When Boaz enters, in addition to exchanging the short greeting with the reapers, “The Lord bless thee” (2.4), Boaz continues singing, in this case Ps. 65, 9, 12, 15. The chorus responds with more verses from the same psalm, and then Boaz concludes with an aria setting of Ps. 107, 8.

All the psalm verses chosen praise God in reference to nature, appropriately for a harvest scene.

Following this exchange of psalm quotes is a Chorale with text and melody based on a late 17th-century German hymn, “O dass ich tausend Zungen hätt” (Goldschmidt, in Preface to the score). Next is a dialogue between Boaz and the Chief Reaper (2.5-6).

Both the narrator’s words and the reference to Ruth as a Moabitess are eliminated. Perhaps Goldschmidt didn’t want to highlight her origins here.
Boaz and Ruth continue with their dialogue, then sing a duet based on 2.12 (2.14-18 are eliminated).

The duet between Ruth and Boaz opens at 2.12 (p. 91, 3rd staff):
Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, a stranger? (Ruth)
It hath been fully shewed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband...and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. (Boaz)

Ruth begins in B-flat major, in 12/8 time, the same as Boaz's later pastorale (Fig. 5). Boaz's words "It hath been fully shewed me" (p. 92, top) begin as a recitative, then speed up into a *tempo agitato* before the orchestra recapitulates the theme of "Whither thou Goest" (1.16-17). Boaz's highest note in this section is an e' flat, sung twice. ff. on "people, which thou knewest not."

The interval skips in this short section may indicate a high level of emotion. The introduction of a musical reference to Ruth's earlier words to Naomi musically underlines what Boaz is saying. The relatively high pitch and volume of the music for Boaz's final words suggest how important he finds this aspect of Ruth's actions.

The act concludes with another Chorale, a harvest hymn ("O Gott von dem wir alles haben") from the same source as the earlier Chorale.

Part II

This part is entitled "In the House of Naomi" and opens with a dialogue between Ruth and Naomi (2.19-21).

The sequence of their words is changed: Ruth continues from 2.19 directly to 2.21, and then Naomi returns to 2.20 and goes directly to 2.22. This was probably done for the sake of simplicity. One interesting alteration is that of "men" to "maidens" in 2.21: in the Scroll, Ruth tells Naomi that Boaz told her to stay close to his men, while he actually said maidens. This was used by many midrashists to prove Ruth was a loose woman: once a Moabite, always a Moabite. Perhaps Goldschmidt was trying to clean up her image with this alteration.

After their dialogue, Ruth and Naomi sing a lengthy duet with text from 2.20 and Ps. 126.6 and Ps. 30.5. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (p. 105, top), signalling their mood of hope and also making reference to the harvest.
They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

The duet begins in b minor and 2/4 time. The words "shall reap in joy" are sung in the related key of D major (2nd staff, final measure), and then the music moves into A major (3rd staff, m.2). The voices follow one another on the first half of the phrase in a *fugato*, rather than singing together in harmony, which they do on "shall reap in joy."

The idea of "joy" is musically represented by D major, one of the brightest keys. This is the chord Mahler referred to sounding "as if it had fallen from heaven" (Preface to this chapter, p.104). When the pitch and key are raised another fifth to A major, this suggests even greater brightness and joy. The dotted rhythm adds further energy to the duet (Cooke 1959, 100). Singing in a *fugato* rather than in harmony could be indicative of each character...
expressing the same thoughts in individual ways. It also implies a strong connection, as one voice follows the other with the same or similar melodic forms.

There is a new melody for the words “Blessed be he” (p. 107, top).

Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead (2.20).

This flowing tune is in 6/8 time, the voices singing homophonically. This differentiates it from the earlier part of the duet, and its opening measures sound more like a religious hymn. A recapitulation of the 2/4 section opens with “Weeping may endure” (p. 109, top). On the word “endure,” Ruth’s voice rises an octave from f’ to f’’, then on “joy,” it rises from g’ to g’’ twice (p. 109, 4th staff, m.4, p. 110, 1st staff, m.3). After this recapitulation, the duet concludes with a repetition of the 6/8 melody (p. 111.top).

In the 6/8 section, Ruth and Naomi are musically depicted as equally devout and completely in tune with one another. The word “joy,” depicted earlier in the duet by the bright D major chord, is painted here with an ascending octave leap.

Chapter 3

In Naomi’s instructions to Ruth, a few verses are omitted. She does not mention that Boaz is a relative, nor does she instruct Ruth to not make herself known to Boaz until he has done eating and drinking, or to note where he is lying and to uncover his feet. Either Goldschmidt was whitewashing the story, or he assumed the plot was so well known that he could leave out crucial verses.

The next scene, entitled “At the Threshing-Floor,” is the shortest scene in the oratorio. After the chorus sings Ps.128.2, Boaz sings a short aria set to Ps. 4.9, “I will lay me down in peace.”

Figure 3: Goldschmidt, “I will lay me down,” no. 25, p. 125

I will lay me down in peace and take my rest; for it is thou, Lord, only, that maketh me dwell in safety.

This simple pastorale (Goldschmidt calls it a “cantilena”) is in B-flat major and 12/8 time. The lower voices of the accompaniment open with a drone on an open fifth, B-flat-F.

The combined musical elements—12/8 time and drone accompaniment—create a typical pastoral sound. Goldschmidt may have added this solo to present Boaz as a figure of safety and peace, or to show him in the context of a pastoral, rural setting.

After this solo, the chorus sings “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5.8).
The encounter between Ruth and Boaz is not portrayed; it is only described by Ruth in the next scene. The first-person account of their encounter is an effective dramatic device, not found in any other libretto discussed here.

The next scene, "In the House of Naomi," opens with Naomi asking Ruth "Who art thou?" (3.16) in recitative (p. 132, top). Ruth replies at length, recounting what happened (3.7-17). A few phrases are omitted, possibly because of the awkwardness of the first-person account. Thus Ruth does not recount that "she went stealthily and uncovered his feet," or that Boaz praised her act, or how he measured out barley for her to take home (3.7,10, 15).

This exciting re-telling is more effective than presenting it in the Scroll's original narrative form would have been.

Chapter 4

The next scene is entitled "At the Gate of Bethlehem" and opens with the Chorus singing Ps. 82.1.3 and 68.5.

These texts refer to God as a Judge who defends the poor, does justice to the needy, and defends the cause of the widows. They seem to foreshadow Boaz's role as an equally just judge.

The chapter proceeds through 4.1-11 (only 4.7-8 are cut); the chorus sings 4.11 in a "cantilena," but does not proceed to 4.12, the reference to the house of Perez (this reference is omitted in over half of the librettos; Preface to this chapter, p. 103).

Perhaps Goldschmidt did not want to remind his audience of the connection to Tamar and Judah.

When Ruth is described as bearing a son, the biblical role of God in her conception is eliminated (as it is in all the works I discuss). Also eliminated are 4.16-17a, the role of Naomi holding the child and that of the women naming him. The final words from the Scroll in this oratorio are "father of David." Following this, the concluding chorus sings Isa.12.1.2 and Jer. 23.5,6.

These concluding verses praise God and refer to David's lineage.

Summary

In this libretto, Goldschmidt intertwines other biblical texts (primarily Psalms) with the Scroll, and uses them similarly to the way the rabbis did, almost as "proof texts." The additional texts greatly increase and affirm God's role in the story.

An unusual feature of this libretto is the re-telling of the events in chapter 3 by Ruth, rather than having the scene played out. It is an almost cinematic flashback effect.

Musically, Goldschmidt effectively weaves a single leitmotif, first heard at the opening of Ruth and Naomi's first duet, throughout the score. This ties all the subsequent action back to their relationship. Rhythmic and tonal shifts, especially between minor and major keys within a single musical number, are used throughout to highlight—and heighten—moments of emotional excitement. Incidental syncopated rhythms appear, especially in choral numbers, for the same purpose.

Duets frequently alternate between legato imitations, in which the characters do not actually sing together, and homophonic singing. The contrast between these two styles of duet suggests the degree of closeness between those characters at a given point in the plot. Characters
are also differentiated musically by different tempos and styles. For example, pastoral elements appear more in Boaz’s music than elsewhere, establishing his context.

Though the large number of choral Psalm settings make this a basically religious oratorio, there is nonetheless great interest musically in the depiction of characters, their relationships and their changing moods. The music also creates a pastoral setting as background for the human drama.

**Leopold Damrosch, *Ruth and Naomi, A Scriptural Idyll* (in English)**
Boston: G.D. Russell and Co., 1875; Words taken from the Bible (KJV)
Ruth—soprano; Naomi—alto; Orpah—alto; Boaz—bass
Narrator—tenor; Chorus

Leopold Damrosch (b. Germany 1832, d. New York 1885) came from a well-known German-American family of musicians. He was a violinist, conductor and composer. His *Ruth and Naomi* is scored with an accompaniment for organ or piano, not orchestra, so it was intended for church performance more than as a concert work (H. Krehbiel in *New Grove*, vol. 6, 876).

Chapter 1  Part 1  The Narrator (tenor) tells the opening verses of the story (1.1-8). There are two minor changes: Naomi is named in 1.1, whereas in the Scroll she is only called “his wife;” and the names of the sons are omitted. The text is all from the Scroll except for the addition of “My dear daughters” before 1.8.

*As in other oratorios, the narrator is usually omitted from within dialogues; for example, 1.8-9 is sung by Naomi and 1.10 by Ruth and Orpah, without a narrator.*

The extended opening scene is a trio between Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah (1.8-17; p. 20). The scene opens with Naomi singing “My dear daughters” [sic].

Figure 4: Damrosch, “My Dear Daughters,” no. 3, p. 20

Naomi begins in a low register of the voice. The key is b minor, with occasionally a lowered 2nd degree, suggesting the related Phrygian mode. The opening words are sung unaccompanied, and “Go, return” is repeated several times, on increasingly higher pitches with sparse accompaniment. On the words “The Lord deal kindly” (1.8; p. 20, 5th staff), a flowing
melody with fuller accompaniment begins. The highest note reached is e', on the last repetition of "the Lord" (p. 21, 2nd staff).

The short aria ends on the word "Return" sung unaccompanied, forte, and with fermata (sustained) indications over the final two notes (p. 21, 3rd staff, m.8). This word is followed by a measure and a half of rests marked with fermata. The dominant F# ending would be expected to resolve in the relative b minor, but instead it moves into B major and a faster tempo.

The Phrygian mode, suggested in Naomi's opening phrase, is often related musically to sadness. The repetition of the same phrase in higher keys is a dramatic device, especially since the e' at the end of the series will sound higher in a contralto voice because of its particularly dark timbre. The long silence after Naomi's words (expressed by rests in the music) could signify hesitation, a sense of loss, and possibly tension, which is resolved in the next section. The unexpected resolution into a major key at this point has the effect of a ray of sun breaking through Naomi's gloom. The move from a minor to a major key signifies a mood shift, which could represent the assertiveness of Ruth and Orpah's response to Naomi's sadness, as heard in their duet.

Ruth and Orpah continue with a duet, "Surely we will return with thee" (1.10).

Figure 5: Damrosch, "Surely we will return," p. 21, no. 3, 4th staff

This duet is marked allegro con moto, un poco agitato. The two voices harmonize in perfect thirds throughout. The duet ends with several sudden key shifts, followed by a sustained measure of silence (p. 22, 1st staff, m.4-6). Naomi then sings a few unaccompanied measures.

The homophonic voices of Ruth and Orpah are a musical indication of being of one mind, united in their feelings for Naomi. The measure of silence at a transition point in the duet is a dramatic pause, like a narrative gap, which can be interpreted many ways. It seems to be a moment suspended in time when all the characters are thinking what they should do next.

Only the beginning and ending of 1.11-13 are retained. Ruth's aria "Entreat me not" (1.16-17; Fig. 7) begins immediately after 1.14; 1.15 is cut.
The big orchestral buildup to this aria is marked *Allegro molto con fuoco*. The aria starts on $f'$, with a skip to $a''$ flat on “leave.” The highest note reached is a $b'''$ flat, on “I” (p. 24, 3rd staff, m.2) and again at the conclusion of the aria, on “thee” (p. 26, 4th staff, m.1).

The orchestral introduction signals the dramatic importance of this aria. The high range and many wide interval leaps in the voice depict agitation, as do the dense harmonies.

A mood change is signaled by the *più tranquillo* notation at the words “Thy people” (p. 24, 4th staff, m.2), where the melody (in A flat major) is hymn-like. There is dramatic use of C-flat major, the flat 3rd degree of A-flat major, on “And thy God” (p. 24, 5th staff, m.2). On the recapitulation of “Entreat me not” (p. 25, top), the vocal line is the same but after a few measures the orchestral part changes; it is marked *ff molto fuoco* and consists of short staccato chords. Over this halting accompaniment, the aria has several long sustained notes: “thou” is held for a full three measures (p. 25, 3rd staff), “die” (4th staff), and “buried” (5th staff) each for two measures.

Several enharmonic pitch relationships are found in this recapitulation, in the voice part. The end of the phrase “I will be buried” (p. 25, 4th staff, m.5-6) changes from G# (“I”) to A flat (“will”); “The Lord do so to me” (p. 25, 6th staff, m.5-6) changes from C flat (“Lord”) to B (“do”); “If ought but death part thee and me” (p. 26, 2nd staff, m.2-3) changes its final F# (“thee and”) to G flat (“me”) while it is sustained for three full measures. The conclusion (p. 26, 2nd staff, m.5) is a third repetition of “Entreat me not,” ending on $b'''$ flat (on “thee”).

On the recapitulation of the opening section, the staccato chords could be heard as resoluteness, as fate, or possibly as a rapid panting. The contrast of this thumping rhythm with Ruth’s sustained notes musically depicts conflict, as found in Ruth’s excited psychological state. The enharmonic changes in the recapitulation are often startling, musically representing (at least in notation) shifting or unexpected emotions. There is also an aspect of transformation, musically speaking, because of the (subtle) change in intonation. Enharmonic change affects the sound as well (F# generally has a higher intonation than G flat). In two of the above cases, enharmonic change goes from sharp to flat, possibly connected with the textual meanings of “burying” and “death.” In the third, the change from C flat to B occurs notably on the word “Lord,” representing hope and possibly also surrender. The effect is of Ruth attempting to calm herself.

The setting of this aria in a high range of the soprano voice is intended to have a dramatic effect on the listener—both Naomi and the audience.
Following this aria, 1.18-21 is cut.
This is one of only two oratorios (the other is Coven) to leave out Naomi's words "Call me not Naomi" (1.20-21), indicative of Damrosch's greater interest in Ruth's story.

Chapter 2  Boaz sings "Hearest thou not my daughter" (2.8-9).

Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them. Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?

The words "Go not..." are sung to a simple melody marked andante affettuoso. A new section, marked dolce, begins on "Let thine eyes be on the field" (p. 38, 4th staff, m.2). The accompaniment is more animated; the key modulates restlessly through several measures. There is a change to 8th notes under "Have I not charged the young men that they not touch thee" (p. 38, 5th staff, m.3). Boaz’s voice rises to c♯, high for a bass (p. 39, 1st staff, m.2), leaps down a full tenth to A (same measure), back up a seventh to g (next measure) before ending on f♯ in b minor (next measure). This passage begins forte but quickly diminishes to piano (p. 39, 1st staff, m.4).

The constant key modulations combined with the wide leaps of Boaz's voice create a sense of agitation. The dramatic intervals, followed by the sudden diminution of volume, may suggest emotions being suppressed, or a greater subtlety in speech.

Ruth responds to Boaz with the words "Why have I found grace in thine eyes" (2.10). Then Boaz continues with "It has been fully showed me" (2.11).

The chorus concludes with Ps.147. 7,8, verses that notably include references to harvest and land.

Part 2  Chapter 3  Naomi sings a recitative and aria to the opening verses (p. 55), 3.1-4, omitting the details about the redeeming kinsman, as well as the instructions to Ruth to not make herself known, and to uncover Boaz's feet; 3.5, where Ruth says she will do as she was told, is also omitted.

These verses are crucial to the story, but it must have been assumed that the audience of that time knew the plot details already.
Boaz’s response to Ruth (3.10-13; p. 63) is very abridged. After he tells Ruth to stay with him, Ruth and the chorus sing the opening verses of Psalm 23 (=14): “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

The remainder of the chapter is deleted.

Again, it can be surmised that the audience already knew the story, or that the composer felt the material form inappropriate for such an ambivalent scene.

Chapter 4

The Narrator picks up the thread of narrative from 4.1, skipping 4.2-8.

The purpose of the deletion was either to avoid confusion over the legal inheritance issues, or because it was assumed the audience already knew the details.

As in other librettos, 4.12, the reference to Perez, Tamar and Judah, is deleted. The last line included from the Scroll is 4.13, which however deletes the reference to God’s role in the birth, also common to all librettos.

After the announcement that Ruth bore a son, Naomi sings an aria (p. 78, 5th staff, m.4), with text from Luke 1.28-32, the announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary:

Hail, hail, the Lord is with me! Out of my house the Redeemer shall come. He shall be great. and shall be called the Son of the Highest. and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Amen.

The purpose is clearly to link David’s birth to that of Jesus.

This aria, marked adagio religioso, starts in E-flat major in a steady 6/8 beat, and is to be sung “in prophetic ecstasy.” On the words “the Redeemer shall come,” there is a transition to C-flat major and an increase in the tempo (p. 79, 2nd staff). A few measures later, there is an enharmonic change from C-flat to B, on “He shall be great” (p. 79, 2nd staff, m.6). There are four descending octave leaps in the voice: g’-g (“Highest”), a’-a (“Lord shall”) (p. 79, 4th staff, m.3-6); c’-c (“ever”), d’-d (“shall be”) (p. 80, 2nd staff, m.4, 3rd staff, m.1-2).

Over Naomi’s low sustained notes, the orchestra plays high repeated chords pianissimo, while other parts of the orchestra double Naomi’s notes (p. 79, 3rd staff). The aria ends on the word “Amen” sung three times, the third fortissimo on f”, relatively high for an alto voice (p. 80, 5th staff, m.3). The note is sustained for three measures on “A-men,” marked ritardando and over a strong F7 chord in the accompaniment under the voice. This leads to a resolution to B-flat major for the fortissimo chorus that follows immediately.

The repeated soft high chords over Naomi’s voice seem to be used here to create a “heavenly” effect. The four descending octave leaps, each starting on a higher note than the last, give the impression of a herald. The high sustained notes at the conclusion intensify the confirmative aspect of “Amen.”

The closing Chorus sings Ps. 95, 6-7: “Oh come! Let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. The Lord reigneth; he is clothed with majesty.”

Summary

The libretto text is entirely biblical, an example of adapting a biblical text for church use. It uses psalms in a similar way to Goldschnidt, to comment on the narrative, but only in a few places. Chapter 3 was apparently even more troubling for Damrosch; instead of having it related after the events, he eliminated it altogether. One of the few New Testament references to be
found in *Ruth* oratorios appears in this work, when Naomi sings text from Luke to announce the
birth of the child. This is clearly a way of almost conflating the story with that of the later birth
of Christ.

In the only true duet of the work, between Ruth and Orpah, the voices are in perfect
homophony. The music frequently shifts back and forth from minor to major very effectively.
Damrosch also uses complete silence in some places for dramatic effect. Other devices found
here to express emotional moments are: utilization of very high ranges of the soprano voice;
many large interval leaps; sequences of surprising enharmonic changes and key modulations.
The same devices are used for all the characters, so generic emotions are more vividly portrayed
in the music than are individual characters.

**Alfred Gaul, *Ruth, a Sacred Cantata, opus 34***
Words by Edward Oxenford. London: Novello & Co., Ltd.; 1880 (for further editions, p. 272)
Written and composed expressly for the Festival Choir of the Birmingham Sunday School Union
Ruth—soprano; Naomi—contralto; Orpah—contralto; Boaz—bass
Narrator—chorus

Alfred Gaul (1837-1913) was an English organist, conductor and composer. His *Ruth*
uses a libretto by Edward Oxenford, not the biblical text. The narrative sections use some text
from the Scroll, but the dialogues and choruses are newly written, in the style of his day.

**Chapter 1**

**Part I: “Sorrow”**
This part opens with these words, which replace 1.1 but give far less information:
A grievous famine smote the land.
And chastened Judah's children sore:
It was the Lord's divine command
That earth her fruits should yield no more.

Naomi then sings 1.8 as a recitative, followed by an aria which opens:

O gracious Lord, cast down Thine eyes
Upon Thy servant here...
And when my life on earth is o'er,
Have mercy, Lord, on me.
And let me dwell for evermore
In Paradise with Thee!
*These verses establish Naomi immediately as a passive and God-fearing woman.*

Following this aria, a choral recitative relates 1.9, followed at once by a trio between
Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi.
Farewell! The hour has come for parting!
Farewell! Love's link must break at last!
Heed not the truant teardrops starting;
They do but greet the mirror'd past!

These opening lines are sung to a simple hymn-like melody in 3/4 time, with an accompaniment of *arpeggio* triplets beneath the melody. Orpah repeats what Naomi has just sung for several measures before being joined by Naomi in very conventional harmonies. Orpah's words are:

"Farewell!" The word is all unspoken!
"Farewell!" it cannot yet be said!
For O our hearts will then be broken,
And peace for ever from us fled!

Ruth's words are:

Alas! And must we from thee sever?
Alas! Our souls are wrung with pain.
O say not it must be for ever,
But soon our lives will join again!

Naomi sings in response:

Alas! My soul is fill'd with sorrow,
Alas! To part is bitter pain;
In comfort from this promise borrow,
In Heaven we shall meet again!

*These words ascribe feelings and deep attachment between the three women barely hinted at in the Scroll.*
The three women sing to the same rhythm and a homophonic texture is dominant throughout the trio. This is a traditional musical depiction of united hearts and minds. Yet at the same time, there a suggestion of a fugato to make clear that there are three women involved. Though they sing simultaneously, their texts are different up to the end.

Ruth’s “Entreat me not” (1.16-17) follows immediately after the Trio.

This is one of the few pieces to retain most of the original biblical text (KJV). The aria is marked con espressivo [sic]. There is a pleading motif of a rising and falling whole step in the orchestra that Ruth repeats on higher pitches in the opening recitative. The higher note builds a dissonance in relation to the chord of the accompaniment. The aria includes two ascending octave leaps, on “for whither” (p. 18, 3rd staff, m.4) and “my people” (p. 19, 1st staff, m.2).

The second part of the aria, starting with “Where thou diest” (p. 19, 4th staff), changes character; there is a faster accompaniment made up of repeated 8th notes in the treble part of the orchestra and Ruth sings in a much lower range. The opening melody returns after this section (p. 20, 2nd staff, m.3), and the little pleading two-note motif played by the orchestra in the opening measures of the aria is sung at the end by Ruth. She sings it in the same key as in the opening, but on the final repeat the motif resolves suddenly to B-flat major (p. 20, 5th staff, m.4).

The plangent two-note motif, with its subtle dissonance, creates a sense of pleading, intensified later by the interval leaps in the voice. These often signal a high degree of emotion. The second part, with its rising bass-patterns, musically portrays a more resolute Ruth, and the sudden switch to a major key at the end denotes hope.

Immediately following the aria is the chorus of Bethlehemites who recognize Naomi (1.19); they are more accusatory here than in the Scroll:

Speak! Art thou that Naomi, daughter,  
Who left us when famine was here?
When streams were despoil’d of their water, 
And Earth was all barren and sere?...
Say, why art thou sorrowful-hearted 
Now home thou art welcome’d at last?

Naomi’s words in 1:20, “Call me not Naomi,” are set as,

   Call me not Naomi, 
   For grief and woe are mine; 
The Lord hath dealt full bitterly 
It was His will divine!
   I went out full from Bethlehem, 
   All empty come I now. 
   Yet to the High God’s just decree 
   My head I humbly bow.

The final two lines, altered from the original text, soften Naomi’s anger against God and make her a much more passive character. This could be modelled after Job, who also received God’s punishment without complaining (Job 1:22, 2:10), and or simply serve as a female role model for the Victorian era.

The words are sung as a quasi-recitative (p. 23, no. 5), in the unusual key of b-flat minor, accompanied only by chords. The closing phrase hangs suspended on the dominant F7. This key, with five flats, is often connected with bitterness and loss, as is any minor key with many flats. The recitative, by ending on the dominant, seems unable to find a resting place. The unresolved musical phrase mirrors Naomi’s sense of loss.

The chorus responds to Naomi with words of comfort, contrasting with their earlier words.

   Weep no more, the Lord will aid thee, 
   He ne’er faileth in distress; 
   Bygone woes have only made thee 
   Fitter for new happiness!

Chapter 2 Part 2: “Joy”

This part opens with a lengthy chorus of reapers, followed by Ruth’s aria, “Let me hie;” an expanded version of 2:2:

   Let me hie unto the field 
   Kindly hearts I there may find...

After Naomi tells Ruth to go to the field (2:2), Boaz sings an aria, “Go not from hence” (2:8) (p. 37, no. 8), a simple, almost folk-like tune:

   Go not from hence, my daughter, 
But glean between the sheaves; 
The field is mine, and all is thine 
That ev’ry reaper leaves. 
Abide here by my maidens. 
And join their mid-day rest; 
No tongue shall say thy gleaning nay.

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Or aught thy search molest...

Ruth responds with “Why have I found grace in thine eyes” (2.10) followed by an aria, “Past all knowledge” (p. 40, no. 9):

Past all knowledge is the kindness
Thou dost show, my lord, to me:
I am lowly, and thy favour
All unmerited must be...

The closing verses sung by the chorus are:
Then went she up to the city,
And her heart was fill’d with joy.
Emotions such as sadness and joy, never mentioned in the Scroll, are attributed to the characters throughout this retelling.

Ruth and Naomi sing a duet “With joyous heart I greet thee home,” which replaces 2.18-23 (p. 46, no. 10):

With joyous heart I greet thee home
O daughter, for thine hour is come:
No more thy weary lot shall be
To dwell, and weep, and wail with me. (Naomi)

With joyous heart thy cheek I press
O mother, full of tenderness;
But, tho’ we part, I still shall be
A daughter evermore to thee. (Ruth)

They continue to say farewell to each other, and Naomi closes with:

Go, cleave to him who is thy lord,
His heart with gracious love is stored;
Go, daughter, go; thine hour is come
To leave me for a fairer home (based loosely on 3:1)

The accompaniment of this very upbeat duet is full of dotted rhythms. Ruth and Naomi each sing the theme as a solo, and then they join in singing it in perfect conventional harmony. They sing the same text at the same moment.

_The rhythm of this duet creates an excited and happy mood. Dotted rhythm in a major key can “produce the impression of courage and confidence” (Cooke 1959, 100). In psychological terms, one could conclude from the homophonic nature of the music that their hearts are united._

Chapter 3 is replaced with “A Chorale: Nightfall,” a prayer:

Look down, O Lord, from realms above.
Look down, we pray;
All dangers of the night remove
From out our way...
As seen in previous examples, oratorio settings tend to either alter, drastically cut, or replace the action in chapter 3 of the Scroll.

Chapter 4 Following the Chorale is "Intermezzo: Daybreak" (orchestral), followed by a Wedding Chorus, a "Slow dance," then an aria for Boaz, "Glory be to Thee, O Lord."

Figure 10: Gaul, "Glory be to thee," no. 13, p. 71

Glory be to Thee, O Lord,
And praises never ceasing;
O may Thy glory, day by day,
For ever be increasing...
Grant that from Thy holy ways
My feet may wander never,
But that to Thee my soul may cleave
For ever and for ever.

Boaz, along with the other main characters, is depicted as a God-fearing and obedient person with no other obvious personality traits.

This aria has a stately and hymn-like quality, with very conventional harmonies. On the reprise of the opening melody, the accompaniment is more agitated, including cadences of 16\(^{th}\) notes (p. 72, 2\(^{nd}\) staff, m.3). The melody, heard in the vocal line, remains the same while the underlying accompaniment is sped up and altered rhythmically.

A change in the quality of the accompaniment may signal an underlying, unexpressed emotion, or a change of mood. The character is still "singing the same tune," but the accompaniment underneath that tune tells another story. Boaz's reference to cleaving to God is sung to a background of firm and resolute music, which underlines his words.

The oratorio ends with the Chorus praising the Lord:

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice.
For blessings round us fall;
Your voices raise
In songs of praise
Unto the Lord of all.
Here, as elsewhere in the libretto, there is an attempt to create poetry that resembles Psalms.

Summary

In this adaptation, chapters 3 and 4 (from the Scroll) are supplanted by a wedding chorus and numerous closing hymns of praise. In fact, this work includes very little text from the Scroll; it is hard to recognize the original story from the poetic libretto that has replaced it. Based on Gaul's popularity, it would appear that this kind of libretto was popular with the public of his time. It is a challenge in the present era to be moved by such lyrics, no matter how affecting the music may be. The characters are portrayed as more passive and more God-fearing than in the Scroll, again in keeping with the conventions of Victorian England.

The most moving music is found in Ruth’s and Naomi’s solos. The opening trio is very conventional and homophonic, a traditional way of depicting hearts united. Yet Orpah is a contralto uniquely in this work; in addition, only here does Orpah sing with Naomi before Ruth begins singing. Gaul (or the librettist, Oxford) might be making a statement about Orpah’s age or the closeness of her relationship with Naomi. Naomi’s solo music has many flats (also the case in Fino: this chapter, p. 151), musically illustrating her sadness. Many of the pieces have a hymn-like quality, by which Gaul attempted to create a religious feeling in spite of the basically secular text.

Frederic Cowen, Ruth, a dramatic oratorio


Chorus: Hebrews, Moabites, Reapers, Gleaners, Elders

Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen (b. Jamaica 1852, d. London 1935) was taken to England at the age of four, and showed precocious musical talent. Cowen knew and studied with many of the great composers of his time, in Germany, Austria and England (Jeremy Dibble in New Grove, vol. 6, 630).

The bulk of the music in this work is choral. Cowen does not include a Narrator, as most oratorios of the period do. The libretto is newly-written but mostly composed of biblical texts, primarily Psalms (all KJV).

Chapter 1 Part I, Scene I:

This opens with a “Hebrew Caravan” passing through Moab en route to Israel. They sing Psalm 90.1 and Isaiah 33.20-21:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations…from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God. Our eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation...

Naomi asks where they are going; when they tell her, she responds with the first aria in this work: its text is Ps. 103.13 and 84.2.
Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.
My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

 Appropriately for a Psalm setting, there is a hymn-like quality to the tune and the 9/8 time signature. In the second part, “My soul longeth” (p. 15, m.2), the melody modulates chromatically as the voice steadily rises from b to d’ a tenth higher on “cry out,” which is held for almost three full measures. The closing word of this section before the reprise, “God,” is sustained for over two measures (p. 16, m.3). The final variation of the original melody includes two ascending leaps for the voice: a seventh (p. 17, m.4) and an augmented seventh (3rd staff, m.2).

Chromatic modulation combined with the rising pitch of Naomi’s voice in the middle part of this aria reflect agitation and the intensity of Naomi’s feelings. Sustained notes heighten the drama of the text and intensify the emotional content, while also focussing attention on a particular word—in this case, “God.” Cowen has turned the Psalm setting into a means of personal expression, in spite of its hymn-like quality.

After her aria, Naomi describes what God has done for his people:

He hath sent them meat to the full (Ps. 78.27)
This refers to the days of Israelite wandering (the reference to meat could also be to Num. 11.31-34, the incident of the quails sent by God), equating their present situation with earlier history.

Orpah and the neighbors all plead with Naomi not to leave:

Leave us not, we pray thee...we will remember thy love more than wine (reference to Song of Songs 1.4). All the upright love thee.

Ruth continues pleading, in an aria (no. 3):
Be of good comfort, arise, He calleth thee and will bring thee by a way thou knowest not. The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants (Isa. 42.16, Ps. 34.22).

The effect of these words addressed to Naomi is to elevate her into a much loved and even revered figure, not only by her daughters-in-law but by the whole community she is leaving behind.

When Naomi is about to depart, the neighbors address her one more time:

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, blessed shalt thou be in the field when thou comest in and when thou goest out (Deut. 28.3, 6).

Scene II: On the road to Israel.

The Hebrews, on the road together with Naomi, Ruth and Orpah, sing:

God shall help us when the morning appeareth. Thou hast been our defence and refuge in the day of trouble (Ps. 59.16).

Orpah sings:

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15. 22). I will go to them that are at rest.

Naomi responds:

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling (Ps. 91.10).

After Naomi sings “Behold, thy sister-in-law…” (1.15), Ruth sings “Intreat (sic) me not” (1.16-17).

Figure 12: Cowen, Intreat me Not, p. 58, no. 5, 2nd staff

The orchestral part has rapid notes rising climactically before Ruth’s opening line, a declamatory recitative sung forte. At “Thy people shall be my people” (p. 58, 4th staff, m.5), the orchestra begins to double the voice. Throughout the section, the music modulates constantly, never settling into one home key.

A new section starts at “Where thou diest” (p. 58, letter H), where a new musical figure is introduced and repeated successively lower, then building and rising to a climactic sustained g’, held for three beats, on the word “death” (p. 59, 2nd staff, m.2). The word is repeated a second time on a lower pitch, d’, sustained the same number of beats. There is a sustaining symbol over
the closing chord and the 8th-note rest that follows it. The aria does not end on a dramatic high note.

The orchestra doubling Ruth's voice in the opening section might have the effect of underlining and confirming Ruth's words. Musically, the constant modulation could reflect the uncertainty of Ruth's future: the lack of a home key could signify her lack of a home. Naomi's response to Ruth's plea in the Scroll is silence (1.18), represented here by the sustained rest. The quiet ending to an aria that began turbulently implies that Ruth has calmed down after saying what she needed to say.

Naomi responds "According to thy words so be it. Thus shalt thou do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart." 1.18-22 are cut, eliminating Naomi's "Call me not Naomi" which is featured in most musical works. In its place, the chorus of Hebrews sings "Arise, let us go again to our own people..." and concludes with "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps.126.5).

This verse was also featured, there in a duet, in the Goldschmidt. It seems the perfect verse to express the fate of Ruth and Naomi, their story starting with tears and ending in joy, all taking place during the harvest.

Chapter 2 Scene III. The Harvest Field

The scene opens with the reapers and gleaners singing Joel 2.22, "Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit."

These are appropriate verses for the pastoral setting.

Some Scroll text is deleted, for example, 2.1-3 and 2.16-18. One sentence is cut from 2.9: Boaz's referring to his commanding the workers not to touch Ruth. Ruth and Boaz sing 2.12-13 simultaneously, as a short duet.

Naomi meets Ruth outside the gate and they exchange words (1.19-22), with the chorus of reapers and gleaners in the background; the chorus closes the scene.

Chapter 3 Pt II Scene I: Thanksgiving at Harvest-Time

There is no encounter between Ruth and Naomi before the harvest floor scene; 3.1-8 have been cut.

Either the assumption was that the listeners knew the story, or the librettist gave Ruth a more active role, as not simply following Naomi's instructions.

After an orchestral introduction, Boaz sings "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!" (Ps. 36.7).

This psalm deals with God's role in creating the fruits of the earth and good harvests, highlighting not only God's role in the story but also Boaz's awareness of that role.

After the reapers and gleaners sing several choruses, they leave and Ruth sings a prayer, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth," before approaching Boaz on the threshing floor. The newly-written text has echoes of several biblical texts (Ps. 31, Jer. 3.4, and others) (p. 155, top).
My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth. My times are in Thine hand; therefore, for Thy Name’s sake, lead me. In Thee do I put my trust; let Thy loving-kindness continually preserve me.

As with Boaz’s earlier prayer, this kind of text makes God a much more active character here in the Scroll, as well as showing much greater devotion to God on the part of the libretto’s characters than those found in the Scroll.

An orchestral prelude (p. 154, no. 13), played molto lento to set a religious tone, precedes Ruth’s opening words. She is instructed to sing con devozione.

There are interesting modulations throughout the aria. The reprise of the first part opens on a C but temporarily in e minor rather than A-flat major as before (p.155, letter T). The phrase “For thy Name’s sake, lead me” is repeated three times, with the last “lead me” sung on a pianissimo a’ flat, dropping an octave on the word “me” (p.156, 3rd staff). This A flat then becomes a G# in an enharmonic shift, which later moves into a minor. Melodically, the transformation is a positive one, as the G# is a step up, on the way to the A that follows. But G# is also the leading tone to a-minor, so there is harmonic ambiguity here.

The enharmonic shift represents an unexpected and emotional transition. This and other harmonic shifts in these passages musically depict emotional agitation and confusion.

As Ruth approaches Boaz, a new musical figure appears in the orchestra, composed of fast syncopated and chromatic octaves (p.156, 4th staff). There is an enharmonic shift when Boaz says “Who art thou,” from C-flat major to B major (p. 157, top). This is a positive transformation, because of the move from flat to sharp. The syncopated, rhythmic accompaniment continues while Ruth and Boaz sing similar melodic curves in a square 4/4 time (p. 157, top two staves).

The new musical figure introducing this section could signify turbulence. The positive enharmonic shift seems to be almost a foretelling of what follows in the action, while the rhythmic contrast between the voices and the accompaniment signifies underlying tension and suspense.

After a short recitative, on “Then will I” Boaz sings a sustained a’ flat, utilizing the dramatic potential of the tenor voice. Most of the rest of this chapter, 3.13-18, is deleted, replaced by a duet.

Figure 13: Cowen, Happy am I, no. 13, p. 159

Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed! Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee (Gen. 30.13, Ps. 116.7 and other) [Ruth].

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Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Wisdom shall give to thy head an ornamental of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver unto thee (Prov. 31.29, 4.9) [Boaz].

Ruth and Boaz do not sing homophonically, but contrapuntally; their solo lines overlap and often end on the same pitch. Their melodies and words are related to, yet different from, each other’s.

Ruth reprises the opening melody of the duet starting on d’ flat, a half-step higher than in the opening. On the next reprise of this theme, she starts an augmented second higher, on e’ (p. 161, 2nd staff, m.3).

The contrapuntal singing of Ruth and Boaz could indicate a physical and emotional distance between them, except for those lines that start or end on the same pitch, which indicates a subtle “coming together.” When Ruth reprises the opening theme on higher pitches, this could reflect a steady increase of excitement and joy.

There are no extreme high notes for either voice in this extended duet: Boaz’s highest note is a’ flat, while Ruth’s is g’.

This could indicate an attempt to keep the music “non-operatic” and not inappropriately dramatic or romantic.

Chapter 4 Scene II. At the Gate

Most verses from the Scroll have been cut. The scene opens with Boaz’s line “Ye are witnesses this day” (4.9) conflated with v. 10. The final Scroll verse sung is 4.11: as in other oratorios, the reference to Perez and Tamar is deleted. The rest of the scene features solos and choruses including Ruth and Naomi—present here though not in the Scroll—and Boaz, the Elders, and People.

Ruth sings “The Lord is my strength and my shield” (Ps. 28.7), following by Naomi “I have been young, and now am old” (Ps. 37.25), followed by Boaz “The meek shall inherit the earth” (the reference here is probably Matt. 5.5, though the text is originally found in Ps. 37.11).

These texts are appropriate to the librettist’s presentation of the three characters: in addition to expressing gratitude to God, Naomi also refers to her age and Boaz to his meekness.

The chorus of Elders sings the Priestly Benediction. “The Lord bless you and keep you” (Num 6.25), and the Elder sings some verses from the Scroll mixed with other verses, most significantly “And a branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa. 11.1) and “He shall grow as the lily” (Hos. 14.5), slightly re-written and re-arranged texts referring to the line of David coming from Jesse. The closing choruses of praise are based on Isa. 61.11 and 44.23:

Sing, O ye heavens, break forth into singing…
For the Lord hath glorified Himself in Israel.
Amen and Amen.

The final “Amens” are markedfff and ffff.

Summary

The libretto is a literal patchwork of biblical quotes, including not only Psalms but also Pentateuch, Proverbs and others. Because of the chosen texts, the characters are portrayed as
more God-centered than in the Scroll. Cowen deletes several scenes found in the Scroll, but also adds new ones. Most interesting is the opening scene, which takes place in Moab. Naomi and Ruth join a caravan of Hebrews passing through, which seems to suggest that Naomi might not have made the journey without this encounter. The reaction of her neighbors to her leaving establishes Naomi as a much-loved figure in her Moabitite community. The presence of a caravan accompanying Ruth and Naomi on their voyage removes the intimacy of the scene usually portrayed as between only the two women, including Ruth’s famous plea to Naomi.

There are numerous additional choruses in this work; in addition to the usual reapers and neighbors, there is also a chorus of Moabites and one of Hebrews. The first two scenes open and close with chorus. This would highlight the intimacy of the subsequent two scenes in which the chorus has a smaller role.

Boaz is unusually cast as a tenor, yet he has almost no high notes or dramatic music. He refers to himself obliquely as “meek.,” so this casting is more along the lines of tenors of pre-Romantic music, such as Don Ottavio in Mozart’s Don Giovanni, also a “meek” yet romantic character.

Hallmarks of Cowen’s musical style are tonal ambiguity, including constant modulation, and many enharmonic shifts. These techniques, typical for the era, have been noted in other works of the same period. Cowen goes further harmonically than his predecessors, and the well-known biblical quotes set to music of sometimes daring dissonances presents an interesting contrast between the traditional (the text) and non-traditional (parts of the music).

César Franck, *Ruth: Elogique Biblique de A. Guillemin* (French: 1844, revised 1872) (“Elogique” is eclogue, based on the Latin name of Virgil’s pastorals. It is a poem in which shepherds converse)

Ruth—soprano, Naomi—mezzo, Orpah—contralto, Boaz—baritone
A Gleaner—tenor. An Israelite—tenor

César Franck’s (1822-1890) *Ruth* (1844) was his first choral composition and first large-scale work. Its first performance, in 1846, was received poorly; Meyerbeer praised it, but Franck’s professors and the public did not. Thirty years later he wrote *Rebecca*, a “biblical idyll,” *Hidda* and several other works based on the Hebrew Bible. In 1871, success came unexpectedly with the resurrection of his oratorio *Ruth*. After he made some important modifications and improvements, the public received the performance favorably (John Warack in *New Grove* vol. 9, 177).

Franck virtually eliminates the role of the narrator, giving the work a more operatic quality. This is one of the only piano scores that includes instrumental notations, which explains my reference to these markings where appropriate. Franck’s orchestrations typically stressed oboe, English horn and bass clarinet (Longyear, 205), and these instruments predominate in *Ruth*.

Chapter 1 The opening chorus of Moabites sings (translations all mine):

She is leaving, the poor mother, the inconsolable Naomi. Is she a stranger to us? Isn’t Moab her friend? Her soul is wounded by long sadnesses, oppressed by a thousand griefs; let her at least be freed in her tears.
The focus here is immediately on Naomi, and there is no mention of her specific losses; in other words, no equivalent to 1.1-7.

Following this chorus is a trio, which opens with Naomi telling Orpah and Ruth:

_Farewell, dear daughters! As I go towards Bethlehem, I entrust you to your families: don’t forget me._

_In the Scroll, Naomi never says “don’t forget me,” and this phrase in the libretto makes her much more real, a woman struggling with her feelings. The librettist has changed “mother’s house” to “your families,” possibly an example of simplifying the text for the audience._

Naomi starts in a quasi-recitative in c minor, 4/4 time (p. 20, no. 3). The first chord, in the bassoons, is followed by Naomi singing an unaccompanied descending two-note motif. The next chord, played by clarinets and horns, is A flat major in the first inversion, and this is followed by Naomi singing the same motif, continuing the descending line. The final note of the minor sixth descent is G, on “Ruth” (5th measure). Naomi’s voice rises on the words “dear daughters,” taking her back to the opening note of the section, e” flat, where she once again descends a sixth by steps. But this time she continues the descent down to c’, on “families” (4th staff, 1st measure).

_Slow descending phrases built around the sixth degree of a minor scale are often used to express sadness, grief, or melancholy (Cooke 1982, 222). The unaccompanied vocal phrases lend Naomi’s character additional poignancy, as she seems “abandoned” by the supporting orchestra. She seems to temporarily gain hope, shown in the rising pitches, but by the end of these few measures, the music depicts resignation._

_Ruth and Orpah respond:_

_If you leave, o beloved, let us leave with you; and Bethlehem will be delighted to hear, through our tears, the name of our husbands._

_This text gives Ruth and Orpah motivation for accompanying Naomi: they want to offer her support and tell the Bethlehemites their story. They seem certain of acceptance once their relationship to Naomi is known. Their strong attachment to her is indicated by the term “bien aimée” (beloved)._

_Naomi responds:_

_Why tie yourselves to so much suffering? Keep the hope of a sweet future._

_The chorus interrupts their trio to express the narrator’s impression (like a Greek chorus): What extreme anguish, what tears, what goodbyes; look how they love each other, a holy, pious love (p. 28, top)._  

_The use of a narrator here contrasts greatly with the biblical narrator, who simply states facts and never offers this kind of emotional commentary._

_In the next trio, called “Strophes” (“Stanzas”), Naomi says (p. 33, no. 5):_  

_My daughters, the widow’s veil could fall from your faces some day; for you, after these trials, time may yet bear fruit and hope return. Farewell, and may God’s goodness spread over you and bring you its sweetest treasures._

_This text makes Naomi warmer and more caring than the biblical Naomi. She is saying essentially the same as Naomi in 1:8-9, but her more bitter and sarcastic words of 1:11-13 do not
appear here in any form. The word “widow” is not in the Scroll but does appear in another
libretto (Fino, p. 141).

This trio opens with a quasi-recititative as did the previous one. After “ni l’espoir sans
retour,” “hope may return,” the orchestra interrupts for four measures with a lilting new theme
(p. 35, 4th staff). Naomi continues her recitative until this leitmotif returns in Ruth’s and Orpah’s
voices. Standing for hope, this becomes the leitmotif for “return.”

Orpah and Ruth respond:
Figure 14: Franck, “Douleur amère,” (“Bitter grief”), p. 36, no. 5, 3rd staff

Douleur amère, Douleur sans espoir, N’avoir plus de mère, Ne plus la voir!
Douleur sans espoir.

Bitter grief, grief without hope, to no more have a mother, to see her no more! Bitter
sadness, sadness without hope.

Unlike the biblical text, where Ruth and Orpah “broke into weeping” (1.9, 1.14), this
phrase gives voice to the specific reason for their grieving: leaving Naomi forever. It thus
suggests deep affection between all three women.

After Ruth and Orpah have sung one phrase each, Naomi interrupts to encourage them:
they still have hearts as their witnesses (“Mais le coeur vous reste, c’est un doux témoin”).

Orpah responds to each line of Ruth’s with similar words and also in a descending
melodic pattern, but with a slightly different musical figure. For example, after Ruth sings
“Douleur amère” (Bitter sadness), Orpah responds “Douleur sans espoir” (Sadness without hope)
in a descending fifth which differs from the pattern of Ruth’s phrase. Naomi joins them singing
different text to the same melody (p. 37, top). Ruth and Orpah’s voices harmonize only in the
final three measures, before the entire trio is repeated.

In this trio, the slight differences in text and melodic figures highlight the individuality
of each woman. The musical pattern of give-and-take remains consistent. It has a different
effect than would homophonic singing, because each phrase builds both musically and
textually upon the previous one. As if lost in her own thoughts, each sings her own tune after
the other. Musically this also depicts each woman reacting to and confirming the other.
Naomi is represented musically as emotionally tied to the other women, but having her own thoughts separate from theirs, even though the three are all “in tune” with each other. The effect of each singer’s lines being heard, rather than intertwining the voices, is an effective device that musically depicts the individual turmoil of each woman.

This trio is followed by Ruth’s Recitative and Aria (with interjections by Naomi) (p. 30, no. 6):

Moi, je vous suis. Non, point d’adieu. Votre patrie est ma patrie, votre peuple, mon peuple, et votre Dieu, mon Dieu.

I follow you, there is no goodbye; your country is my country, your people my people, your God my God (Recit.)

There are notable changes from the Scroll. The opening words, “I, I follow you” (“Moi, je vous suis!”) indicate a stronger, more assertive Ruth from the Ruth who pleads “Do not urge me to leave you” (I.16).

Franck’s is one of only two Ruth works treated here that does not include a fully developed aria setting of these words (the other is Fino); it opens as a declamatory quasi-recitative (p. 39, no. 6) and then moves into a very brief (10-measure) arioso (Fig. 15). The orchestra plays a short musical pattern between Ruth’s phrases in the recitative. This pattern is in g minor the first time, e-flat minor the second, b minor the last; the opening note of the pattern is d”’, then b’ flat, then f”’ flat. Together, these notes form an augmented triad, which is implied in the score. By lending the music a kind of hidden chromatic uniformity, it creates uncertainty in the harmonic progression. The starting note for each of Ruth’s phrases rises by half steps, so that she concludes one full step higher than she began, also an implied melodic pattern.

The absence of any fixed key of orientation, as found in this recitative, is a musical representation of uncertainty. But the subtle pitch rises in the vocal part seem to suggest an increase of Ruth’s resolve at the same time, in spite of her underlying uncertainty.
I want the same land, opening the same tomb for us, to receive the daughter and the mother at the end of our days, which will be the most beautiful.

The reference to the end of their days being the most beautiful is a completely new concept, indicative of Ruth’s confidence that they will spend the rest of their lives together happily. The original “Thus and more may the Lord do to me” (1:17) is omitted, making Ruth less centered on Naomi’s God.

The aria starts in an uncertain A major, only firmly in this key at the double bar (3rd staff, m.3). It is noted pianissimo, moderato with a strumming 16th note accompaniment which later slows down. The sense of unsettled harmony derives from the A major chord being built on the second inversion (on the fifth) rather than on the tonic.

Unsettled harmonies depict Ruth’s conflicted emotions here as earlier. Naomi’s response is:
Viens, ma fille, et de ma vieillesse, sois le flambeau, sois le soutien.
Le Dieu qui donne la sagesse, n’abandonne jamais un cœur comme le tien.
Come, my daughter, be the torch of my old age, be its support. God who gives wisdom, should never abandon a heart like yours.

The reference to supporting Naomi in her old age is a reference to 4.15, in which the women tell Naomi that Ruth's son will offer this support.

Naomi is completely silent at this point in the biblical version, but most musical settings attribute a response to her. Here Naomi is inviting Ruth to come with her in order to support her in her old age, while also ascribing her invitation to God's will or command.

At Naomi's entrance, the tempo and rhythm slow. Naomi sings in a very limited, low range.

This seems to be a musical reference to her calm and to the "old age" she refers to.

Ruth ecstatically proclaims:
Of what happiness my voice is inebriated, to the impulses of a maternal heart, in Naomi I abandon myself in the hands of the Eternal. In what sweet tears, in what transports will I follow her towards the mountains of Israel.

This text paints a joyous Ruth who seems to equate joining Naomi with joining God. The text also expresses intense feeling between the two women.

Ruth begins in the same key as Naomi has just sung, possibly a musical indication of their being "in tune" with each other.

The "Greek chorus" sings:
They leave. Moab weeps for them: you, Bethlehem, will be for them a sweet and holy dwelling place; alas, alas.

The next chorus is identified as the Bethlehemites. They recognize Naomi and welcome her (p. 48, no. 8):
Our hearts hear your hearts. Come, we are your brothers and sisters, you are not strangers.

Completely absent here is the sense of surprise or excitement expressed in 1.19.

Naomi sings the heartbreaking short aria "Ah désormais":
Ah! Désormais, quand le deuil me consume, de ce doux nom, nul ne m’appellera:
Appelez-moi du nom de l’amertume; Ne dites plus Noémi, mais Mara.
Ici jadis, je vivais dans la joie, et je reviens sans fils et sans époux:
seule avec Ruth, le Seigneur me renvoie; Veuve comme elle, ayez pitié de nous.

Ah, when henceforth grief consumes me, no one will call me by this sweet name. Call me
by the name of bitterness; say no more Naomi, but Mara.
Here, in other times, I lived joyfully. Now I return without son or husband;
alone with Ruth, God sends me back, a widow like her. Have pity on us.

In contrast to the biblical Naomi, who opens with the words “Do not call me Naomi”
(1.20), here the first mention is of the grief she expects to be experiencing from this time forward.
Her references to living joyfully in prior times, coming back with Ruth, also a widow, and asking
for pity, are all new elements. Their addition indicates a strong emotional bond between the
women and also again depicts a more open and human Naomi. Completely absent from these
verses is any mention of God’s role in Naomi’s misfortune, whereas in 1.20-21 Naomi refers to
God four times as causing her misfortune.

Naomi sings this aria as a response to the chorus. They end in F major and Naomi
immediately enters in f minor. She is accompanied by an English horn, playing with her as if in a
duet, but lending a more mournful sound than a voice would. The dotted rhythm at this slow
tempo, coupled with the minor key, gives a weary and dragging feeling to the emotional
expression. This rhythm as been used to tone-paint in funeral music (Cooke 1959, 100).

The sudden change from major to minor that opens this aria is a startling shift to a
darker mood. Phrases sung to a slow dotted rhythm alternate with triplet figures, adding to the
sense of weariness and halting, irregular steps. Along with effective use of rhythmic contrasts,
the beauty of this melody creates a Naomi of great poignancy.

The chorus responds to her aria (p. 55, 2nd staff):
Ah Naomi, let the good Lord answer you, he tests all the saints, he is master of the world and life is in his hands.

As earlier, the chorus again not only comments on the action, but also comforts Naomi. The focus on God's role is transferred to the mouths of the chorus from that of Naomi on the Scrolls but with a more positive slant. The reference to "all the saints" implies that they put Naomi in this category, a very interesting elevation of her status.

The chorus opens singing Naomi's final F in unison, reverting immediately back to F major from F minor, another sudden, dramatic mood shift. There is a hammering bass accompaniment of persistent triplets in the orchestra, a rhythmic ostinato (repetitive pattern). The chorus sings unison, until Naomi sings her last poignant and bitter words in this scene:

Without husband or hope, weeping for all those who are no longer, I go to the country of my birth, to be closed up as in a grave. Regrets are superfluous. She is once interrupted by Ruth and Orpah, who sing a single measure together, "Douleur amère" (Bitter grief) (p. 58, 1st staff, m.4).

This is the only libretto I am discussing in which Orpah accompanies Ruth and Naomi all the way to Bethlehem. It makes no dramatic sense, since Orpah would then have to walk all the way back on her own. But it makes Orpah as devoted a daughter-in-law as Ruth.

Before Orpah sings "Adieu donc, ô mère chérie" (Farewell then, dear mother; p. 58, 4th staff), the "return" leitmotif of the earlier trio is heard. The scene ends with Orpah's goodbye, sung in the tonic, B-flat major. Orpah's vocal line descends, accompanied only by clarinet, and diminishes from p down to pp, musically a "vanishing" effect. Though her last note is B-flat (the tonic), the accompanying chord is in the first inversion, making it musically a provisional ending.

The fact that she has the "last word" in this scene attributes much greater importance to Orpah than is found in most other works. It could also be an attempt to depict a bond between the three women so powerful that Orpah simply could not have let Ruth and Naomi take their journey without being by their side.

Chapter 2 Part 2

This scene opens with a chorus of reapers (p. 58, no. 9):

Everything the happy worker gleans, it is God who gives it to him, only to God goes honor.

Although there is no interjection of specific Psalms texts as in other 19th century works discussed, the theme of gratitude to God for the harvest is present here as well. Most references to God in this libretto are made by the chorus. Though they take the part of "actors" more than in other 19th century oratorios, at the same time they continue to serve the more conventional function of praising God.

Chapter 3 Part 3

The scene opens with Boaz asking who it is sleeping at his feet (3.9) (3.1-8 are omitted). Ruth answers (p. 90, no. 12):

It is Ruth, your humble servant; Mahlon my husband is dead; let Boaz hear the cry of blood and of the grave; let him deign to spread his cloak.

To replace the original conclusion of 3.9, "for you are a redeeming kinsman," explaining
why she is asking Boaz to spread his cloak. Here Ruth reminds Boaz of her husband’s death and uses a phrase, “hear the cry of blood,” with biblical resonance (most notably Gen. 4:16).

Before Boaz responds, the rhythm changes to repeated 8\textsuperscript{th} notes (p. 92, 5\textsuperscript{th} staff, m.1), a steady beat which could suggest “confirmation.”

May God protect hope! My pious wishes have restrained the gratitude of this old man. An impious, jealous language would accuse you, yes! Ruth, you are my wife if Boaz can marry you.

The words “wife” and “marry” replace the biblical term “redeemer” (6.13). The addition of the terms “pièce”(4 pianos) and “vieillard”(old man) depict aspects of Boaz only hinted at in the Scroll.

The steady beat continues under the first part of Boaz’s aria. The aria begins in the same key as Ruth’s previous aria, D major. The second section, beginning with “Ruth” (p. 94, top) repeats Ruth’s earlier melody (a D major pastorele) in B major.

The rhythmic steadiness of Boaz’s aria lends it a solemn and serious tone. Though Ruth and Boaz do not actually sing together in this scene, the fact that Boaz opens in the key of Ruth’s previous aria, and at the end Boaz is singing Ruth’s song, are musical signals that they are “in tune” with each other.

The rest of the text is:

There is a closer relative. If he says no, I say yes. Waiting for day to break, sleep, saint, my daughter. And when you have slept, go tell Naomi everything.

Interesting additions here are the term “saint” Boaz uses for Ruth, an indication of Boaz’s idealization of her; and his instruction to her to tell Naomi everything, recognizing the closeness of that relationship. This replaces the biblical version in which Boaz gives Ruth barley to take home to Naomi.

The next scene takes place in the thatched cottage (chaumière) of the widows. Ruth tells Naomi “Il dit oui, si Phal dit non” (Boaz says yes if Phal says no; p. 97, top).

Naomi responds in an aria:

Honor to God who loves us, he inspired my advice: honor and grace to God if Boaz followed it. Ruth is the star that shines on the decline of my days, you will always be my daughter, and I your mother, always. The farewell at the final hour is not a complete farewell; in the holy light Ruth will rejoin Naomi.

There is no equivalent to this response in the Scroll, where Naomi simply reassures Ruth that Boaz will settle the matter (3.18). These verses show a more God-centered Naomi than has been seen previously, and depict once again the enormous love and strong bond between the two women. There is a repetition of the reference to the “final hour” first heard in an earlier scene. This could be an oblique reference to Naomi’s advanced age.

Chapter 4 The scene opens (no. 14) with the announcement that Phal has ceded his rights to Boaz, the “saintly old man.” Ruth gives herself like Rachel and Leah to the faith of Israel (4.11). In the “Prophetic conclusion,” Boaz sings:
In my heart, what intoxicating joy; earth is nothing in my eyes, the divine breath presses on me and I read in the book of heavens that the passing of time is linked to eternity. I contemplate saintly descendants from the foreigner: I see, o marvelous wonder, I see in the fire of her rays the desire of nations coming out of this same stem.

Though no personal names are mentioned—Ohed, David the assumption in this “biblicized” text is that the listener will recognize the allusions, i.e. that “saints descendants from the foreigner” probably is meant to refer to Jesus descending from Ruth.

Continuing with similar vague allusions, the chorus concludes:
Give to your people, to your church, great God, give a divine torch and let its clarity lead to the dawn of eternal day.

The use of the word “church” here implies a Christian slant, yet the words are otherwise vague and universal.

Summary
This work is in a different category from those previously discussed, because its original libretto does not include biblical quotes and only in a few spots does it even attempt a biblical “sound.”

There is a striking contrast between the text of the final words, both of Boaz and the closing chorus, and the scenes between Naomi and Ruth, and Orpah. The bond between the women, with the “Greek” chorus even commenting on that bond, is painted with a much more realistic brush than the later scenes. I would suggest that both Franck and his librettist were more moved by the women’s story than by the biblical narrative as a whole. The “prophetic conclusion” feels like a nod to the public’s expectations of a biblically-inspired oratorio.

This libretto places the opening scene in Moab, as does Cowen’s. Orpah’s role is enlarged; she even accompanies Ruth and Naomi all the way to Bethlehem. This is in keeping with a consistent depiction, through words and music, of a deep emotional bond between the women. They react and respond to one another; their motives are spelled out as emotion-driven; and they comment far less on God and God’s role than on one another. Naomi is painted as a less bitter and more caring person than in the Scroll. References to God, including Naomi’s, are all positive. God is not blamed for her misfortunes. Boaz’s age is clearly suggested as advanced through the use of certain terms. His language is more formal and stilted than the women’s, which makes his character stiffer. The Greek chorus functioning as narrator underlines the emotional moments in the story.

Musically, sudden dramatic key shifts appear at important moments. Characters are differentiated by key and rhythm. In several places, a melody is repeated to a new, more agitated rhythm, suggestive of increasing excitement. This power of music to express inner feelings is utilized more by Franck than earlier composers of Ruth settings.

Giocondo Fino, Naomi e Ruth, Poema Biblico in Tre Parti (Biblical Poem in Three Parts) (in Italian)
Versi (libretto) di Saverio Fino, G. Ricordi & C., 1908
Ruth—soprano; Naomi—mezzo; Boaz—baritone (no Orpah)
“Veiled woman”—mezzo; Chorus (men, women, and mixed)
Giocondo Fino (b. 1867, d. 1950) studied oriental languages and theology before turning to music. In addition to *Ruth*, Fino also wrote an interesting version of the story of Deborah a year earlier (1907). He wrote several operas for the theatre and some liturgical works (*Enciclopedia della Musica*, vol. 2, 1981).

Though written in 1908, stylistically this work is late Romantic, therefore it is being classified as a 19th century work. This is notably the only *Ruth* adaptation called a “Poema Biblico,” a “biblical poem,” giving the author license to create a sort of midrash in verse. Saverio Fino, who wrote the libretto used in the opera, was born in 1888 and may have been related to Giocondo. Much of my analysis of the Fino work centers on the libretto, including its extensive descriptive sections, some of which are reproduced here (more examples are in Appendix I, pp. 261-3). Those parts of the libretto analyzed separately from the music will be noted by the libretto page number. Most of the commentary on the action is from the libretto, so these passages are in quote marks.

**Chapter 1 Parte Prima (First Part)**

[I have translated and reproduced the extensive notes found throughout the libretto and score]

In this version, the opening scene between Naomi and Ruth (there is no Orpah) takes place at the outskirts of Bethlehem, with the reapers singing in the background; this foreshadows the action of Chapter 2. In other words, 1.1-7 are deleted and therefore the audience does not know the past history of Ruth and Naomi or what brought them to Bethlehem.

“It is early dawn, the reapers are reaping the barley which waves in the fields around Bethlehem: they are singing one of their songs”:

The stars are already scattered, there are rosy veils in the east: in the freshness of the tender skies let's reap the crops... (p. 5)

Naomi has the largest role in this work (titled *Naomi e Ruth*). She is the first to sing, as she appears on a hill, leaning on Ruth “the compassionate one.”

“Naomi sees the houses of Bethlehem turning white and points them out to Ruth; then she pulls Ruth towards herself affectionately and kisses her hair.”

Naomi sings (p. 14, reh. #13):

*O nuora, io tramonto e sei tu gioia d’aurora. Io resto, o mia serenatrice guida, stanca, tu no.*

Ritrova tu la fida chiostra ove i solchi Moab ara opimi, la ti ridisse amor nei baci primi un di mio figlio, e forse ancor l’amore rinverrà per te; però che’il fiore, se precoce leggi, gemma e rifiore.

O daughter-in-law, I am the sunset and you, the joy of dawn. I will remain, o my serene guide; I am weary, you are not.

Find the boundary of rich fertile tracks in Moab where love came to you one day in the first kisses of my son, and maybe you will still find love again, the flower, if it was attached early, re-flowers and germinates again.

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As in the Scroll, Naomi pleads with Ruth to go back to Moab, except she has let Ruth be her "guide" all the way to the outskirts of Bethlehem. Her concern that Ruth find another husband is only expressed in chap. 3 of the Scroll. This text also contrasts with Naomi's words at this point in the Scroll (1:11-13), where she sarcastically refers to her own inability to bear another son to be a husband to Ruth. The references to Ruth's love for her deceased husband are completely absent in the Scroll.

Naomi's aria starts in the unusual key of e-flat minor and in 4/4 time, but continuous modulations and some dissonance create little sense of a home key. On the word "aurora" (dawn: p. 14, 3\textsuperscript{rd} staff, m.1). Naomi and the treble parts of the orchestra have an A-flat against a low A natural in the bass part of the accompaniment. This dissonance is heightened by the syncopated orchestral accompaniment that begins in the next measure. The dissonance seems resolved with a G-flat, but the new chord that arises is also dissonant. The word "stanza" (tired) is sung twice, both times on descending fifths, on lower pitches the second time (p. 14, 5\textsuperscript{th} staff). On the words "tu no" (you are not), the last word is sung over a D major chord (p. 15, measure before reh. \#14).

The setting of Naomi's opening words in e-flat is significant, as there are many flats throughout the opera for Naomi, representing her sadness. The dissonances and syncopated rhythms throughout this section create an unsettled quality, musically representing Naomi's state of mind. Typical word-painting with music is the falling pitch on the repeated word "tired."

After the next section, "Ritrova tu..." (Find the boundary... p. 15, reh. \#14), Naomi continues:

You will have both husband and children, for you are pious; but I have no more children to tell you they are mine, daughter-in-law...

These words express the same sentiment as 1:11, except there Naomi seems more bitter.

Ruth responds (p. 18):

My heart is a widow of your son, and if you lament him, I will cry with you in your grief. In the Scroll, the women never refer to themselves as widows. In fact, even the narrator does not identify them with the usual term נחלות. In this libretto the term is not used directly to identify the women, but Ruth calling her heart a "widow" of Naomi's son lends them both pathos. The term was also found in Franck (p. 131).

After more dialogue, Ruth, "with a cry of affection," sings:

The eye of a mother, ah! looks into my heart like God, for judgment...

I will follow the path marked by you, your people will be my people, and I will pray to your god on my knees and I will share your grave (p. 6).

Based on 1:16-17, this version makes some interesting alterations. First of all, this is not a plea to Naomi, but a statement of intent. Changing "your god will be my god" to a promise to pray to Naomi's god on her knees indicates the librettist's lack of understanding of Jewish prayer customs.

After Ruth's words, the women embrace. "The sun has risen. The reapers leave the fields and go down to the well, passing near the two women. Some stop to look at them; some, suspiciously, recognize Naomi. The Bethlehemites feel the goodness of heavenly joy, but the
women remember with jealousy the name of Naomi, which means lovely, and they have the curiosity and stings of bees (p. 6)."

The description of jealousy among the Bethlehemite women is an interesting innovation, creating greater interest in Naomi and the potential for dramatic conflict.

The Bethlehemites (males) and reapers (females) now all call out to Naomi: Naomi, back among us again? You’ve returned to Bethlehem?

Naomi responds:

Figure 17: Fino, “Ah! Non dite omai Noemi!” (“Ah! No longer say Naomi”), p. 28, reh. #31

Ah! Non dite omai Noemi! Bellezza è fiore, e mi s’è disfiorita! E sol d’amara radica ho più vita. Ecco, e son Mara, son Mara.
Con due figli partii, tutto, tutto mio bene, a due morti ora il cor singulta e geme.
Chi dice: fu Noemi? Chi dice: fu la Bella?

Ah! No longer say Naomi. Beauty is a flower, and I have been deflowered (dishonored) and have life only as a bitter root, and behold, I am bitter [repeated four times].
I left with two sons, they were all that was good in my life; now over two dead sons my heart sobs and moans.
Who says: “This was Naomi”? Who says: “This was the beautiful one?”
Behold, I am ‘Mara’ (bitter)” [repeated four times].

The most striking omission from this text is the name of God and God’s role in Naomi’s misfortune (1.20-21, with its four mentions of God who caused her grief). Here she mentions her two sons, where in the Scroll she only refers obliquely to leaving full and returning empty. There is great emphasis in this version on Naomi’s bitterness.

The aria is marked larghetto and con grande sentimento di dolore (with great feeling of sadness). Its broad sweep and shifting rhythm have Verdian echoes. The melody starts on e” and drops, initially a half-step and then a fifth, musically a sign of increasing sadness and resignation. The two-bar phrases consist of four quarter beats, and two beats of triplets followed by two
quarters. The word “Noemi” is sung to an ascending diminished fifth, $f^\sharp$ to $c^\flat$, where the listener would expect $c^\natural$.

When Naomi sings her first “Ecco” phrase (m.5), the orchestra doubles her notes, with no chords. Then the orchestra returns to its earlier interlude in a still higher register (3rd staff), returning to the home key of $c^\flat$ minor (m.3). The high register of this section accentuates the lower register of the vocal line that follows. Naomi repeats the phrase “Ecco, son Mara” several times a capella, starting on $g^\flat$ and moving down, ending on $d^\natural$, though the key remains $c^\flat$ minor.

The diminished fifth interval on “Noemi” vividly depicts Naomi’s bitterness. The unaccompanied voice and lower pitches at the end of this section create a feeling of desolation and solitude. The lack of tonal resolution at the end echoes Naomi’s bitter and hopeless emotional state.

The next part of the aria, “Con due figli partii” (I left with two sons: p. 30, reh. #27), is agitato, with a six-measure orchestral introduction setting the mood. The music consists of two-measure groups of rising and falling chords; most of the descending figures are chromatic. This is derived from the ‘seufzer’ or ‘sigh’ figure. The agitated orchestral figures continue under Naomi’s sustained line. Flutes play a sustained $c^\flat$–$f^\#$ through the first part, later playing different sustained notes as the key modulates. At the same time, a repeated $C^\#$–$c^\flat$ octave in the accompaniment is harmonically a drone and a rhythmic ostinato. On the words “singult a e gemme” (sobs and moans), the voice drops an octave, singing the words on $c^\flat$.

The use of chromaticism and descending figures set a mood of despair, accentuated and dramatized by the drone and ostinato. The closing words almost imitate the sound of a sob.

The next part, “Chi dice” (Who says: p. 31, m.3 after reh. #28), is more like a recitative. After this, to the same broad, Verdiante tune as the opening of the aria, Naomi sings:

Ancelle [sic]; io sono ancella e piu son Mara.
Handmaid[s]; I am a handmaid, and also I am Mara.

The reprise is shorter than the original, and the coda (p. 32, 5th staff, m.2) takes Naomi unexpectedly up to $f^\flat$, a minor 3rd higher than the expected diminished fifth interval sung in this spot earlier. This note, sung on “Mara,” is the highest in the aria; in the conclusion, the voice drops to $c^\flat$, which leads to a shift to $c$ minor.

After the harmonically startling and high-pitched “Mara,” the ending on this same word, with its minor tonality and low pitch, is a musical portrait of resignation and exhaustion.

The mixed chorus responds (p. 33, reh. #30):
Ah! Ch’essa reca come in un mortorio, alla terra dei suoi chiuse memorie.
E fiele e sangue gli occhi arsi le piangono, e nell’assenso ha bevett’l’anima.

Ah, she returns as in a funeral, to the land of her closed memories, her burning eyes weep gall and blood, and her soul has drunk wormwood.

In the Scroll, the people do not respond to Naomi at all. Here they are very sympathetic to Naomi’s plight and empathize with her bitterness.

These words are sung a capella in a complex 4-part contrapuntal piece.
The voices singing unaccompanied could have a chant-like and mournful sound. The contrapuntal vocal writing would effectively transmit confusion and the multitude of reactions among the group.

"The people move away commiserating. Naomi remains still, facing her people, mute, pallid, like a statue."

Ruth sings (p. 7):
Mother, you watch their pity, mutely, no longer looking at me; my own cry is almost a lost echo of their scream: you are a swallow looking for the nest, lost crossing the sea, and I cannot find your home.

Naomi responds:
O Ruth, it is the echo of every voice, crushed, as a wave is smashed on a rocky bank and the swallow conceals its wound, and no longer has its house, reduced to a skeleton without a stalk.
Naomi compares herself to a swallow without its nest or materials to build a nest, emphasizing her plight and highlighting her homelessness. This element is never the focus in the Scroll and its inclusion here adds pathos to Naomi’s situation.

Ruth: Naomi, I see the eye of your son which returns to my heart with your look.
Naomi: He brings love back to your pity.
The theme of Ruth’s love for Naomi’s son as an element of her bond to Naomi was also found in the opening scene.

"The two women sit looking into each others’ eyes and smiling. Ruth makes a sign towards the fields and Naomi assents with a nod; Ruth walks away and is lost in the fields from which the song of the reapers arises."

Chapter 2 Parte Seconda (Second Part: p. 9)

"In the hot afternoon, Boaz is speaking to the reapers near the well at an oasis. From the immense countryside the solitary voice of Ruth the gleaner rises."

Boaz sings:
Eagerness is muted. In the field only one is still cheerful: the gleaner...

The reapers respond:
Pretty puts her songs in her heart, and she glean, hand and eye vigilant like the kid that gnaws the after-grass, like a hen pecking seeds.
Ruth’s name is never mentioned in this exchange, Boaz is simply curious about Ruth’s cheerfulness, and the reapers note that she is pious and glean like an animal, which could be a reference to her hunger or a subtle put-down, suggesting Ruth acts like an animal.

"The water bearers leave with the men in the field; Boaz remains alone near the field and has a start. Near him the voice of a veiled woman rises, which sounds strange and arcane to the old farmer" (p.10).
There is now an extended scene between Boaz and a "veiled woman" (more text in Appendix I, pp. 261-3). The words are mystical and suggestive. When they both hear Ruth's song, Boaz is overcome with emotion as he seems to remember another young girl in the fields (p. 13):

The girl, my spouse in love, to whom I called to God all night with my outreached soul...and the sky was alive with stars and without a breeze, and the girl, married in another place...God on his throne didn't hear me crying...

The veiled woman:
The young boy, unaware, he grew up in the dark silence, with other pleasures than the young Bethlehemite girl..

Boaz (by now aware that he is in front of a woman who reads his heart like a page in a book, turns to her anxiously):
What do you know? You, woman--and keep silent?

The woman responds (her voice trembling with emotion):
It was Naomi, your first dream, tireless cicada, who in the fields, a blond starling, picked stalks.

Boaz continues (p. 14):
The enchanting voice that excited me then, an enchantment I have looked for all my life, in vain, O, is Naomi still in the fields, a blond starling who is gleaning? Who are you, Woman?

The woman, falling to her knees before him, proclaims:
I was Naomi!
This scene has a mystical and dream-like atmosphere.

"Following this confession, there is a long silence in which the strong heartbeats can almost be heard. Naomi has revealed herself and keeps her eyes lowered. Boaz looks at her and almost extends his arms to her, but Ruth's song once again passes between them almost like a summons and a reproof. Naomi gets up and silently withdraws, while Boaz looks in the distance for the singer. Naomi sees that look, quickly grasps as the will of God the separation from Boaz for the creation of new paths, and trembles at this realization. They leave each other thus, with not another word, only with a look filled with intimate significance."

By suddenly calling the "veiled woman" Naomi, Fino makes the situation very clear. Whether it is the present Naomi, or a mystical vision of the young Naomi, remains ambiguous. The idea that Boaz's first love was Naomi but that she left Bethlehem to marry, is an intriguing midrashic retelling. Naomi is now ceding her place to Ruth, although it would seem that in Fino's version, Boaz is closer to Naomi's age. There is little textual basis for this interesting retelling; in the Scroll, Naomi and Boaz never even meet. Fino seems to have based his idea entirely on Naomi's first mention of Boaz as a redeeming kinsman (2.20).

Most of chapter 2 is replaced by this encounter scene. After the reapers sing another song, Ruth returns from her day of gleaning and sings about her day gleaning in Boaz's fields.
Chapter 3

There is no break here in the opera: the scene continues with Naomi’s instructions to Ruth:

I: per il bene e per la pace io volgo tuoi di figliuola: e con le figlie al campo oggi hai cantato del parente nostro, che tira l’orzo, se fai notte, all’alba.
Or: tu sii monda e sii d’unguento fina nella schiava ma che hai più bella.
E: caut.a l’uom non ti sappia, ma tu si il giaciglio notai e rimovi all’assonnato il pallio, e ti giaci ai piedi suoi, ch’ei dica a te tua via...

I direct your days for both the good and for peace, my dear daughter, and with the girls in the field today you have sung of our relative, who gathers grain at night-fall, at the threshing floor.
Now wash, put on fine ointments and your nicest cloak; don’t let the man know you, but you note the pallet and remove the blanket off the sleepy one, lie at his feet and let him tell you what to do.
These verses are slightly altered from 3.1-4. There is an added reference to Ruth singing: she has been heard singing in the fields in several scenes.

These words are to be sung dolcissimo (very sweetly). The opening words are sung on rising notes of a C major chord, from e’ to c’. As Naomi gives Ruth instructions, her melody remains calm and sustained; but as she tells Ruth “e caut.a” (be cautious: p. 106, reh. #55), the accompaniment suddenly switches from an espressivo tune that interlocked with Naomi’s melody, to repeated 8th note chords played pianissimo in a high register. C major chords in the orchestra conclude (p. 107, reh. #56).

The key and tempo here are both indicators of calm and simplicity, while the rising pitches transmit emotion. When the accompaniment suddenly changes, there is a musical suggestion of both caution and agitation. The fact that the orchestra is playing pianissimo means the listener has to pay close attention—as does Ruth. The return to C major at the end is a kind of resolution, leading the listener to feel that there is nothing to fear.

After more dialogue, the chorus of reapers closes the scene.

Parte Terza (Third Part: p. 16)

Naomi sings:

Only the eye of God keeps watch over hearts, and Ruth has already soothed all distress. Peace!

“The Moabite women (believing Naomi is sad at Ruth’s abandonment, giving vent to their jealousy of the beautiful Moabite) sing”:

Steeped in bitter regret, her tears dropped, and the gleaner shed tears. Naomi, listen: the land of Moab has sad women, and old grudges.

This is the only appearance of the Moabite women. It is an intriguing idea: if Bethlehemites could live in Moab, why not the reverse? And if there were Moabite women in Bethlehem, it would be logical for them to feel ambivalent about Naomi and Ruth.
"Ruth, who is lying at Boaz's feet in the vast plain, knows she is obeying mysterious laws, and waits for the sky to signal her new mission." She says:

There is peace and turmoil in this silent waiting!

Boaz awakens with a start and sees the woman at his feet. He immediately imagines a diabolic temptation and is afraid of it (p. 17):

Oh terror, a woman lying at my feet; or is it a demon wrapping my heart in its spell? Who are you?

"Ruth immediately gets up, and is on her knees before the old relative. Her voice is humble and supplicant:

Servant to my lord, I gathered stalks in the field, but not for myself, and Naomi wants her progenitor. I pray you wrap me in your cloak, accept me, if the relationship is legal in your eyes...

These verses are based loosely on 3.9, but in the Scroll there is no reference to Naomi. Here Ruth is clearly motivated only by Naomi's needs.

"Boaz is moved by the woman, so simple in her words, so good and humbly honest. He puts a hand on her head and speaks to her, looking at the sky:

O daughter, your piety is blessed in heaven, for youthful ardor did not burn in your heart: and the honest ward of your relative, heavy with years, you have elevated with prayer.

Boaz does not invoke God's name to bless Ruth here, otherwise the verses are similar to 3.10. But what is barely suggested in the Scroll about the relative age difference between the two is overt here. Qualities like "good" and "honest" are attributed to Ruth here.

Ruth continues:

Naomi said to me: "He will tell you your way, and holy Bethlehem will not have a scandal."

Naomi did indeed tell Ruth that Boaz would tell her what to do (3.4), though she said nothing about Bethlehem or a scandal; but in the scene between Ruth and Boaz in the Scroll, Naomi's name is never mentioned.

Ruth mentioning scandal may be intended as a ploy to pressure Boaz to do what he needs to do. It could also be a message from Naomi to Boaz (via Ruth) suggesting a subtle form of blackmail, telling him to keep their past relationship quiet.

"...In the mystery of the hour, an almost supernatural spell can be felt surrounding these two, Boaz pulls Ruth towards him with paternal gentleness and consoles her."

There are several references to Boaz's age: he is called the "old relative," "heavy with years," and he has "paternal gentleness." Nonetheless, a lengthy love duet follows, so Boaz may be depicted as old, but certainly not as decrepit.
The love duet between Boaz and Ruth is lengthy; I have chosen several passages from the middle part, where the musical themes are most fully developed. The lyrics throughout are highly poetic and filled with imagery and metaphors.

Boaz sings:

Figure 18: Fino, "Donna, fu pura l'anima tua" ("Woman, your soul was pure"), p. 144, reh. #28

Donna, fu pura l'anima tua, pura siccome giglio all'alba, che al ciel teneramente apre candore, ed aprasi così puro tuo core.

Woman, your soul was pure as a lily at dawn which opens candidly and tenderly to the sky and thus does your heart, equally pure, open up.

Though no part of this libretto is biblical, references to Song of Songs can be detected in some of the vocabulary: for instance, "lily" appears twice in that text (Song of Songs 2.1, 2). Other librettists take or adapt verses from Song of Songs for this love duet, probably feeling that this raises the expressions of love to a higher level (i.e., Schumann, p. 162; Rumshinsky, p. 175).

This section opens on $f'$, relatively high for a baritone. It ends calmly, one octave lower. The high opening note, coupled with the poetic language, immediately portray Boaz as a more lyrical and passionate figure than a bass Boaz would be, in spite of his age indicators in the libretto.

Ruth continues "with ingenuous abandon":

Oh! Il core è nube che striscia, che fuma fasciata al monte; ma è, se poggia al cielo, velo d'argento per il firmamento.

Oh, the heart is like a cloud (haze) that trails along, that evaporates over the mountain, and seems like a silver veil for the firmament.

This section (p. 144, reh. #29), marked molto espressivo, begins with an octave leap from $f'$ to $f''$: on the $f''$ the key shifts to D-flat major, a relatively complex key, considered by Cooke the "luxurious key" (Cooke 1959, 175). The rhythm changes to 4/4, a broader time, with the
accompaniment under Ruth's flowing melody *arpeggios* in the bass, while the higher parts of the orchestra double Ruth's voice. The tune is full of leaps: g' flat up to f', and an octave leap from a' flat to a'' flat (p. 145, m.5 from reh. #29). The end of this section is in e flat minor, the final repetition of the word "argento" (silver) on e' flat. The final E flat becomes a D#, leading to an enharmonic shift to B major with the bass part in the first inversion. In this key, the orchestra plays a variation of Ruth's melodic tune, "molto dolce" (very sweetly). The bass note finally moves from the first inversion to the tonic.

The numerous vocal leaps coupled with the harmonic shifts are all musical indicators of great excitement. The choice of the luxurious D-flat major (Cooke 1959, 175) adds passion to the music. There is a momentary unsettled feeling with the first inversion, but when it moves to the tonic there is a sense of finality (Cooke 1959, 89).

Later in the duet, Ruth sings:

Long ago I came out from the darkness and the mystery and with a smile I slowly came into your thought, and with an arcane smile I revealed myself serenely to you. Now God hears us...

On the words "Or Dio ei sente" (Now God hears us...p. 48, top) in C major, the phrase is marked *rallentando molto* (much slower). Over an accompaniment of steadily ascending 16th note *arpeggios*, Ruth sings a startling leap of a ninth from g' to a''. The orchestra echoes the vocal leap in the "luxurious" key, D-flat major; as it descends, Boaz enters, continuing the descending cadence (p. 148, 1 measure after reh. #31).

The unexpected C major, large vocal leap, and return to D-flat major, all depict the height of excitement and even ecstasy:

Boaz sings:

And God turns us in unspoken yearning towards the dawn, towards love.

After Boaz sings, the orchestra plays an interlude (p. 149, 3rd measure), marked *espresso molto*, a lyrical melody played over 16th note *arpeggios* that steadily increase in speed and volume. The melody is a series of descending broken chords of uniform chromatic structure, starting on ascending pitches.

Harmonically this interlude could be connected with the concept of a supernatural vision, in keeping with the libretto.

Ruth answers (p. 18):

Oh! I am no longer a flower of the first dawn, nor do I know how to make a garland that does not also have a thorn among its leaves, and the smile of every bud makes me cry, and the rose and the acanthus I have woven into a crown.

There are oblique references to Song of Songs again; the mention of "thorn" recalls the "lily among thorns" (2.2) which thus also recalls Boaz's opening line in the duet.

"Boaz detects in Ruth the delicate memory of her widowhood as she continues":

I hear with trembling the voice of love that touches lightly, but does not dare..

Boaz responds:

Timid one. listen, and repeat: Wife..
"A force, almost a spell, has now taken hold of and linked these two souls. They have met in the purity of dreams and ideals...in that smile of the universe they completely abandon themselves as in a marvelous vision (p. 19).

The librettist makes it very clear that this is not a simple love story between two mortals; there is a pure and mystical aspect to their love.

Notably absent in this lengthy scene between Ruth and Boaz, is any actual blending of the voices. One of them will occasionally imitate a melody or theme first introduced by the other. But there is no "coming together" vocally. (This is true of all duets in the opera).

"Ruth has abandoned herself with ingenuous enthusiasm to the effusion of love she feels...flourishing in her soul...while Boaz has fallen to his knees with his forehead to the ground in adoration. In the sky a star passes which wrings a cry from the woman. Boaz is called back to life with that cry. He asks Ruth if she heard a voice in the heavens." She answers:

In the heavens was an infinity of stars, and one shone on my hills, alive, then quickly fell on your fields.

But Boaz, still seeing the vision from before, says:

On the indolent cry a hymn arose. God sought and God prayed: let the dewy heavens rain [bring forth] a righteous man. o Lord...But it was beyond the heavens that God shone light, and God spoke the Word to the universe beyond the heavens, saying: "He will come."

God's name has been mostly absent from this libretto, but now that the final scene approaches, God is given a role. Near the start of this duet, it was clear that there was a mystical aspect to the feelings between Ruth and Boaz.

"Boaz searches the sky as if awaiting the Messiah promised and prophesied to the Israelites; he almost seems to understand that the Messiah will come out of his lineage, and he exults. Ruth, on the other hand, not being Israelite, feels only love."

The implication of this comment is that both as a female and a Moahite, Ruth's integration will never be complete. This closing scene depicts a Ruth that remains outside the world of Boaz and Naomi.

Ruth continues:

The Moabitess heard no word but yours alone, and fascinated, she sealed it in her heart, smiling again at the reflowering of love.

This is the only time Ruth refers to herself as Moabite, implying that she feels more like an outsider than she has before. She also is depicted as accepting her inferior position.

"But perhaps Naomi the Israelite had the same vision as Boaz at that time, as she arises to sing the prophecy among the multitude of shepherds (p. 20):"

Exult, o Bethlehem! Raise your pure (innocent) brow to the centuries, o small tribe, for prophesied glory this wife's nuptial bed has mystical virtue. Exult, o Bethlehem! Now no longer the last Ephrathite from Judea, you are now among the cities from whose dwelling Emmanuel will come.

The use of the name "Emmanuel" is clearly a Messianic reference (Isa. 7.14; later Matt. 1.23), referring to the son who will come out of the house of David.
"The chorus of shepherds has repeated the prophecy with joy...the reapers have returned to work repeating their song which very softly weaves into the song of prophecy."

Dawn touches the heavens with soft fingers, the skies are pink and the moon hides itself in its veils like a bride...

The final reference to a bride is obviously to Ruth, who will be responsible for the birth of the prophesied Messiah.

Summary

As a completely original libretto, this falls into the same category as Franck’s work, except that as an opera it could be virtually secular. The reference to “Emanuel” at the end may have been a nod to public expectations, as in Franck. Other than this ending, there are few references to God; most occur in the lengthy love duet. The librettist and composer presumably knew what would make the story of Ruth interesting and appealing for the audience of their place and time.

The libretto reads almost like a novel because of the extensive “stage directions,” which are often long narrative accounts. The most interesting element Fino added to the story is a sense of mystery, in the character of a “veiled woman” that seems to be Naomi as a younger woman. There is also a mystical element to the Ruth-Boaz relationship, which inspires “a sense of spiritual mystery and awe” (OED). There are several mentions of Naomi’s son in dialogues between her and Ruth, an addition to the story that suggests Ruth’s allegiance to Naomi is based on their in-law relationship rather than mere affection (see Fuchs comments, ch. 2, p. 27).

The chorus’s role is a dramatic element in this work, because they engage with the characters and express feelings. Boaz is referred to as an old man, though this does not affect the degree of passion expressed in the love duet with Ruth. Along with passion in this duet, there are many references to God, placing their love in another realm. This may have been Fino’s understanding of the biblical story.

The most frequent musical device found in this opera is that of the curving and arching melody. Voices swoop up and down in a kind of musical arc at every emotional point in the libretto—which happens in almost every scene. Naomi’s music has many flats, indicating sadness; this device was previously seen in Gaul’s work (p. 124).

Other devices seen elsewhere but used in a more extreme way in this work, include vocal leaps and constantly unsettled harmony and rhythm. The love duet is the musical highlight of the work, containing some of its most beautiful melodies. These are developed and sustained longer than more fragmentary melodies in the score, which are part of Fino’s style in general. The change seen here from fragmentation to sustained melodies might have been a matter of focus for the composer, and a compositional device utilized to convey a different mood. Both the text and music of the conclusion convey a sense of calm and resolution.
Part II. 20th Century

Georg Schumann, *Ruth* (oratorio) op. 20 (in German, with English translation)
F.E.C. Leuckart, Leipzig, 1909 (orchestral score); G. Schirmer, 1910 (piano score)
Ruth--soprano; Naomi--mezzo; Boaz—bass (no Orpah)

Georg Schumann (b. 1866, d.1952) was a prodigy on both violin and organ, and studied piano as a teenager at the Leipzig Conservatory. He was appointed director of the Berlin Singakademie with the title of Royal Professor in 1900, and remained in that post for fifty years (Joseph Clark in *New Grove*, vol. 22, 759). He conducted the final 20th-century performance of his *Ruth* in 1946, just six years before his death. The work was revived and performed at the Berlin Philharmonic on 4 November 2003. Because I attended that performance, and also had brief access to the orchestral score, I will be commenting more extensively on the orchestration than I have been able to for previous works. Schumann’s harmonic style falls on the border between the late Romantic and early 20th-century.

Schumann’s libretto is a mix of extended biblical passages— notably *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs*—with “biblicized” passages blended in. There are two different translations. The one in the orchestral score includes the original German and an (unattributed) English translation. The piano/vocal score has English only, an “adaptation” by Henry G. Chapman.

Schumann uses leitmotifs throughout. Most notable is the “Whither thou Goest” motif, which opens the entire work in the clarinets (Fig. 23), and is then repeated in the strings. I am calling this Ruth’s leitmotif I, while I call the theme heard in Ruth’s aria to the text “Let me now follow after thee,” Ruth’s leitmotif II (p. 18, m.3 after reh. #31). Naomi’s opening phrase, Naomi’s leitmotif (Fig. 24, m.2), is also found throughout the work. These themes link all the sections and characters of the oratorio.

Figure 19: Schumann, first page of orchestral score: Ruth’s leitmotif I

This is the only example from the orchestral score I am providing. It highlights the solo clarinet opening.
Chapter 1  1. “Naomi’s Lament”

The work opens with Naomi expressing her grief and singing nostalgically of her past life (none of this text is from the Scroll). “Naomi’s Lament” (Fig. 24) is a very lengthy aria, showing Naomi’s prime importance at the beginning of this work:

Figure 24: Schumann, Naomi’s Lament, p. 4.

O my God! Why hidest thou thy face from thine handmaid, O Lord? Wherefore smite thy servant, Lord, and take from her the joys of the living? Wherefore didst thou take my husband, and take the children whom thou hadst given me, making us orphans, me and this one here?

Lord, behold and see now, if any sorrow be like my sorrow that hath o’ertaken me. Lord, conduct thou the matter of my spirit, and deliver my soul!

Lord, have compassion. Fear fills my heart. And my soul is sick within me for weeping. All my strength faileth me and is gone, and as one who dieth am I forgotten, like a pitcher that is broken at the well.

The opening line of this section is a paraphrase of Job 13.24; the middle section “if any sorrow be like my sorrow” paraphrases Lam 1.12; and the closing line is a paraphrase of Eccl. 12.6. These are based on some of the darkest and most pessimistic of all biblical texts. The rest of the text is written to sound “biblical”, to root Naomi’s expressions of grief in the biblical world. Though none of it is text from the Scroll, it elaborates the similar trajectory of emotions from fullness to sorrow found there.

The orchestra has a substantial introduction, to be played allegro agitato. Instruments heard in this introduction include trombones, bass trombones, tuba, harp, and kettledrum. The key is initially e# minor, but the chromaticism and constant modulations prevent the music from settling into one key.
After two pizzicato notes in the strings (audio tape), the first beat of the orchestral introduction to “Naomi’s Lament” is a rest, immediately establishing a syncopated rhythm. In addition to the syncopation, the repeated opening chords change from quarter-notes, to 8ths and triple-8ths. This rhythm is further complicated by the ties between notes. Under this unsteady beat, the opening figure, Naomi’s leitmotif, is played in the orchestra by English horn and clarinet (m.2, Fig. 20).

Naomi sings “O my God!” on three rising tones. A, B flat, C#: an ascending half step, followed by an augmented whole step. This is Naomi’s leitmotif. The repetition of this theme starts an augmented whole step higher, taking the voice to C, while the orchestra plays a forte c# minor chord (a rare moment of a simple triad). The same unsettled and markedly chromatic music marks the next section. “Why hidest thou thy face” (paraphrase of Job 13.24) (p. 5, m.5 after reh. #6).

After this section, a new theme enters, involving a descending major sixth followed by an augmented ascending fifth (like a leading tone) followed by a rise of a half step. To this motif, Naomi sings “Lord, have compassion. Fear fills my heart” (p. 7, m.7 after reh. #11). The word “heart” is sung to an a-minor chord in the unstable 6th position, accompanied by one beat by a tambourine. Then the orchestra begins a low, pianissimo tremolo accompaniment. The strings playing “am step...” on the bridge: this creates higher overtones and de-emphasizes the fundamental tone. Over this Naomi sings: “And my soul is sick within me for weeping...” On the last beat of every phrase, horns echo the three-note leitmotif. The horns continue playing the melody with the voice here, while the strings play pizzicato. The last phrase descends chromatically (p. 8, m.8 after reh. #13) within a fourth, a traditional lament motif, with rests breaking up the words “pitcher” and “broken.” The only accompaniment at this point is an ostinato note in the horns and kettle drum. The final note of the section is a flat, with the voice doubled by the basses, accentuating its depth.

The combination of chromaticism with unsteady rhythm in this opening section creates a mood of restive urgency. Naomi’s leitmotif is first heard in English horn and clarinet, whose plangent sounds set the mood. In the midst of a series of dissonances, the sudden strong c# minor chord on Naomi’s repetition of her opening phrase gives a momentary feeling of resolution but also great sadness. The next tonal rest is also on a strong chord, but there the presence of drums heightens the drama and seems to deny any resolution. The unexpected sound of a tambourine is a fascinating if subtle reference to Naomi’s “oriental” origins. The strings playing on the bridge creates an ominous sound, especially in a section so filled with chromatic intervals. Breaking up the words “pitcher” and “broken” with rests gives the impression that Naomi has no breath or strength left to continue. The word “well” is sung at the bottom of the alto register, an example of tonal word painting. At this point, Naomi has reached her lowest level, emotionally as well as vocally.

The next section (p. 9, top) in D-flat major (the “luxurious key,” see Pt. I, p. 148), marked “con espressione,” is slower, more lyrical and tonal.

I did also love the place where was my dwelling; great things, as well, I wrought there, builded houses, planted vineyards, too; I made me gardens and likewise orchards, and planted all manner of fruitful trees therein; I got me men and maidens, and many servants; and whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them, nor did I withhold my heart from pleasure (Eccl 2. 4-5, 2.7, 2.10).

These words ascribed to Naomi create a rounded figure, with nostalgia for a previous life; if the biblical portrait of Naomi is a sketch, this is a life size painting including a background. The choice to place the words of the (male) poet Ecclesiastes in her mouth is interesting. Schumann’s choice of text may have been based on its pessimistic sentiments.
There is an echo here of Prov. 31, in which the husband praises the virtuous wife who, among other accomplishments, acquires an estate and plants a vineyard herself (Prov. 31.16). But the significant difference is that in this libretto, the woman speaks for herself, in a first-person account.

It would have been unusual, not to say impossible, for an Israelite woman to have the kind of wealth and independence described here by the male poet. But Schumann wanted to create a portrait of a strong woman and was not concerned with historical accuracy.

This section is far more melodious and soaring than the previous one, but dissonances and unusual intervals are still present. Horns and clarinets double Naomi’s melody, later joined by flutes and oboes. The rhythm is steadier and there is less chromaticism.

The next section (p. 10, reh. #17) abandons the sense of tonic orientation and returns to the previous fast tempo:

But when I looked on all my works that my hands had accomplished, and the labour, all that I had labour'd, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit in it.

And then I saw how that wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness (Eccl. 2. 11.13). Old and weary I return to the country of my fathers. Hopeless now, without desire, full of misery I have turned to death with longing!

Thou alone art now my refuge! Come, come, and deliver me from the thrones of my spirit! Lift thou up my spirit to the stars, that illuminate remembrance, come, come!

The opening words are sung in a very low range (between c' and g) to a theme composed of very small intervals: half and whole steps, diminished thirds and fifths, augmented seconds and thirds, as the melody gradually rises in pitch. Initially only the cellos double the voice, then tuba and bassoon join, followed by flutes and oboes. There are strong contrasts between the root of the chords (p. 11, m.1-4): f minor-e minor-G-flat major-a minor. The tempo accelerates to Allegro con moto at the section starting “And then I saw how that wisdom excelleth folly” (p. 11, m.6 after reh. #18). The rhythm returns to the syncopated, irregular and jagged one heard at the opening of this lament.

The music becomes highly dramatic (p. 13, reh. #19); the voice descends and ascends an octave (d' - d), then descends an augmented octave and ascends again chromatically. The pattern is echoed in oboe and clarinet while strings play tremolo underneath the dramatic melody, while the wind section echoes earlier themes.

The extensive use of brass and woodwinds to double Naomi’s voice creates a more dramatic, piercing, and also more poignant sound than strings. When the rhythm at the end of this section calms, it musically depicts a calmer Naomi, as she remembers her happier days. The vocal leaps and chromatic ascents in the final section create a sense of emotional chaos and uncontrollable grief.

The final section, “Thou alone art my refuge” (p. 13, reh. #20), marked pesante (heavy), opens with only strings playing underneath the voice; then oboes and clarinets join in the melody. On “lift thou up my spirit to the stars” (reh. #21), bells ascend chromatically as an echo to the voice. The volume and pitch crescendo right up to the end. The final word “Come” is sung on a flat (p. 15, top), which shifts upwards enharmonically to c’'. On the climactic note, strings in a high range double the voice, and the c minor chord includes a dissonant G natural.

The bells add a “heavenly” sound on the verbal reference to stars, and the rising pitches could represent a physical ascent. The continued increase in volume and pitch
musically illustrate Naomi’s grief as it builds to a frenzied longing for death. Because of the dissonance in the closing chord, the feeling is not only of grief, but a lack of resolution.

2. Dialogue, Ruth and Naomi

After Naomi’s Lament, there is a dialogue between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth opens with:

It is a good thing to wait in patience for the help of the Lord, and to trust him.

Ruth’s leitmotif I is heard, accompanied by flute and oboe trills plus harp, instantly tone-painting brightness in Ruth’s character to contrast with the darkness of Naomi’s. Ruth, like Naomi, mentions God’s name in her opening phrase, though with a totally different intent. Ruth speaks of her trust in God, while Naomi had opened with a complaint against God.

Their dialogue leads to Ruth’s “Intreat [sic] me not”:

Figure 21: Schumann, “Intreat me not,” p. 17, 3rd staff, m.3 after reh. #30

Intreat me not to leave thee; My heart is grateful to thee, but my soul is bereft of consolation. My heart crieth humbly to the Lord. Let me now follow after thee, take me with thee, nor drive me away from thee! (1.16)

The first two phrases are sung a capella and ad lib., meaning the singer is free to sing the phrase at her own tempo and freely. They are followed by Ruth’s leitmotif I in the orchestra (Fig. 21, m.3-4), which has a light, upbeat feeling because of the sense of a major key and the 16th-note leading tones. On Ruth’s last phrase, “Let me now follow after thee” (p. 18, m.3 after reh. #31), both the voice and orchestra have a more flowing and passionate melody including big leaps, Ruth leitmotif II, which is repeated in several keys.

The singer’s freedom to sing a phrase ad lib. can heighten its expressive power because of the sense of spontaneity involved. The vocal leaps to steadily higher pitches depict increasing excitement.

Naomi responds to Ruth’s words:

Unto whom shall I compare thee, to give thee consolation?

The fact that Naomi responds at all to Ruth’s words is an addition (also found in other works), since in the Scroll she remains silent.

Ruth answers:

Say no more unto me, that thou dost desire me to leave thee! (p. 18, reh. #32)

This is sung to the Ruth leitmotif II, first heard on “Let me now follow,” but in a different tonality. The musical phrase continues to rise, up to a’ on “to leave” (p. 19, top; Fig. 22).
which is sung forte and molto ritardando. The voice descends a seventh to b', leading directly into “Whither thou goest” (1.16-17, KJV):

Figure 22: Schumann, “Whither thou goest.” p. 19, m.2

The opening measures are marked espressivo e con fuoco (fiery, passionate). The melody, Ruth leitmotif I, opened the oratorio and has been heard in short snatches in previous sections. Though the theme is still in a major key, the dotted rhythm becomes more irregular here and is coupled with a complex and dense accompaniment. The voice is doubled in flutes and oboes, and the harp plays at the end of each phrase.

After “buried,” there is a forte E major chord (p. 20, reh. #34) and a new time indication of largamente maestoso (broad, majestic). The frenzied orchestral accompaniment suddenly dies down, and only a few chords are played under Ruth’s lines. The word “thee” is on a sustained a’ sung ff and held for four full beats (2 measures before reh. #35). On the note itself, the chord is F major; but the orchestra ascends chromatically over the note, creating dissonance with the sung a’’, until the voice descends to e’’ and back to the home key of E major for final resolution. At this point, the dynamic marking is still ff, but a few measures of conclusion in the orchestra gradually bring both the pitch and volume down, concluding on a soft E major chord in the full orchestra, including snare drum, with the violins playing an open E (audio tape).

Ruth’s leitmotif I opened the oratorio and has been threaded into the music before this scene. When the theme is sung here for the first time, its lyricism is combined with passion because of the complexity of the accompaniment. The climactic high note appears on the word “thee,” underlining the intensity of this relationship. The conclusion of this section on a soft tonic chord conveys calm and joy, as well as a sense of anticipation and mystery from the slightly eerie sound of an open E in the strings.

Part 2

They enter Bethlehem; the chorus (mixed) recognizes Naomi (“Is this Naomi?” 1.19) and wonders what brings her back from Moab. They ask why she forsook their land when it was in need, and why she returns now. On the word “this” (“dass” in the original), they hiss on the final “s,” creating an angry sound.

Naomi asks:

Have I done any wrong, or aught that is unrighteous? Have I evilly treated those who dwell with me in concord?

She then continues with “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21, KJV; p. 26, reh. #9).

This short (nine-measure) arioso is introduced by strings playing high pizzicato chords followed by two 8th notes (bowed), playing a diminished seventh interval. The
opening measures move from e minor to G major, while the bass accompaniment remains B (2\textsuperscript{nd}) then C\textsuperscript{7} inversion of the key. On “Call me Mara,” the key shifts from G major to g minor (m.3-4); the words “the Almighty hath dealt” are sung on e flat minor and b minor. The aria ends inconclusively on a C\textsuperscript{7} chord.

The effect of this arioso is of an island of calm resignation in the midst of the stormy chorus that precedes and follows it. The numerous minor keys portray sadness, but this is also a depiction of a strong and self-possessed woman, through the simplicity of the melody and solidity of the chords under it. Her confidence seems to wane, heard in the unresolved conclusion.

The people continue to express anger and hostility:

Why dost thou spread abroad thy trouble? Reply! Has the grace of God been known to fail? Wherefore didst thou forsake thy brethren and wherefore now return?

Naomi responds:

God’s ways are marvelous and how unsearchable his judgments (Rom. 11.33).

They are not sympathetic, and tell her:

Call not upon him, God the almighty. In his justice he hath chastised thee with righteous wrath! He has chastised her, that she forsook the land of her fathers.

Laughing, they say: See how her conscience weighs her down.

Naomi responds:

Over my mishap do ye now rejoice together, do ye all wish to band yourselves against me? Ye smite me, I cannot tell why; Ye pursue me, I know not for what. There are echoes of Job in these phrases.

They respond: God hath turned against her. Let her suffer, spurn her, curse her!

Naomi now turns to God: Lord, I cry unto Thee, hear me, O hear me!

The chorus (in music marked Allegro con fuoco):

Let her suffer, pursue her, and drive her away, even as smoke is driven away, even as wax is melted before the fire (Ps. 68.7)... Let her suffer, and show thou forth thy power!

The idea of the Bethlehemites being resentful of someone who left during a famine and then returned when the famine ended, is not completely far-fetched, even though there is no hint of this in the Scroll. The meanness and cruelty of the people contrast with the almost godly patience and gentleness of both Naomi and Ruth, even though all are calling on God for their own purposes.

The chorus stops abruptly at Ruth’s entrance, signalled in the orchestra by a high violin tremolo (audio tape). Ruth asks them:

Wherefore have ye turned your hand against this woman? Think ye your speech is just and righteous? Do ye judge a person with justice and honour?

The chorus wonders aloud who this woman can be, when she continues, singing over their voices:
Make an end of your oppression! See how she suffers! Can ye find one among you to measure her distress? Which one will share with her her sorrow, or bear her grief with her?

They again wonder who sent this woman to them, as Ruth sings a patchwork of words and phrases from Psalms, primarily Ps. 37.1-2 and 23.1-4 (as seen in earlier oratorios: Goldschmidt, p. 112; Damrosch, p. 117; Cowen, p. 129) to harp accompaniment, increasing the aura of holiness surrounding her. Naomi’s leitmotif is interwoven throughout the section.

Naomi expresses love and gratitude to Ruth which are never seen in the Scroll:

O Ruth, thou beloved, thou hast steadfastly journeyed with me. The Lord will keep thy feet upon thy way!

The closing words between the women indicate that their strength lies in their bond.

Chapter 2  3. In the Harvest Field.

The chorus of reapers is introduced by a solo oboe, traditionally used for a “shepherd” sound. The music is full of orientalisms (Preface to ch. 6, p. 105) and its folk-tune style is totally different from the previous section (audio tape).

Ruth hears the singing and begs Naomi to let her go (2.2: 2.1 is left out). Naomi’s response is:

Why wouldst thou seek the fields of strangers?

This is a logical reaction considering their reception in the previous scene, unlike Naomi’s response in the Scroll, where she immediately grants permission.

But Ruth convinces her to let her go and glean. After a chorus of peasants, Boaz enters and asks about Ruth. Boaz’s entrance is preceded by several harp arpeggios in C major, a very bright, almost regal entrance. When the reapers answer (2.6-7: in place of the servant), he asks them to bring her to him.

Boaz’s entrance could be mistaken for a page from Wagner’s Siegfried, and when Boaz sings his request, accompanied by heavy brass (as he frequently is in this work), there is more than a hint of Wotan (from Wagner’s Ring Cycle) in his music.

The reapers wonder why he is asking about this woman.

Boaz asks Ruth what brought her here. An orchestral interval depicts Ruth’s hesitation. She answers:

Want and care it was that brought me here, to escape from suffering I have gleaned behind thy maids today.

Naomi, now my mother, left the land of Judah. With Elimelech and her two sons she found a home in the country of Moab.

’Twas love that led me to her house, where with vow for vow we pledged our troth now and evermore!

Yet for us in a strange land with the years there came misfortune. From Judah’s soil uprooted, soon Elimelech and both his sons passed away: one was my husband.

And we were left behind, their mother and I. So have I returned with her unto this land, seeking grace before the gates where once her home was; praying, hoping for grace.

Ruth refers to Naomi as “mother” in other librettos: Tino (pp.141, 144) and Rumsinsky (p.172) are examples. These verses essentially sum up 1.1-7, even though they appear here in chapter 2. In this sense, the focalizer is Ruth, not Naomi (eh. I. p.18). There
are some notable changes: it sounds as if Ruth's love for her husband led her to Naomi's house, where the two women exchanged vows. This would explain why Ruth wanted to follow Naomi: they had made a vow to one another ten years earlier. This is not elaborated further in the libretto.

"From Judah's soil uprooted" preceding the recounting of the deaths of all three men hints that the leaving of their own land could have been a cause of their deaths. The stress on Judah rather than Bethlehem is also found in Berkeley (p. 189).

"Seeking grace" was never a motive in the Scroll, only finding food (and possibly a husband). This adds an element of piety or religiosity to their quest.

Boaz tells Ruth that he knows full well what she has done. Part of his response is sung to the melody of the Ruth leitmotif I. Boaz gives instructions to the reapers (2.15) in very pompous music. The range of his music in this scene is quite low, ranging from F to c.

_Having Boaz's words sung to the Ruth leitmotif_ musically links the destinies of all three characters. _The pompous music gives Boaz an air of importance and power._

The remainder of the scene summarizes the action of chapter 2. While a male chorus sings a hymn-like and tonic melody accompanied by harp, Boaz sings over them (the music is marked _molo espressivo_):

_O my God, what seed hast thou sown here in my heart! O Lord, whose mercy knowest no end._

_The metaphor of seed sown can refer to either love he is feeling for Ruth, or the seed that will be planted from their coming together. Either way, Boaz experiences it as something coming from God, which places his love on a higher plane (this was also seen in Pino, p.150)._  

Part II 4. "Naomi's Counsel" (p. 104)

In a brief orchestral introduction, the Ruth leitmotif I appears in the cellos three times, rising by full steps on each repetition. This pattern is repeated while Naomi sings. The scene opens with Naomi asking Ruth:

_Tell me now, my daughter, where hast thou gleaned and gathered? Where wroughtest thou in the field today? (based on 2.19)_

Ruth responds, preceded by a short _melisma_ in the oboe (p. 105, measure after reh. #2):

_O Mother, can I tell thee where I went? For my feet were set in the way the others went, but my soul within me... This could be based on the way Ruth seemed to have found Boaz's field by chance (2.3). It expresses Ruth's surprise at how this happened._

_Naomi asks:_

_What causeth this trouble in thy heart, and wherefore so restless?_

_Ruth answers, con passione:_

_Ah, can a heart where towering waves are swelling escape the thoughts that from its very depths are welling? (p. 106, reh. #4)_

In a passage of wide and unexpected intervals, Ruth mentions Boaz's name, and Naomi tells her who Boaz is (based on 2.20). Ruth repeats the name "Boaz" on a descending sixth, from
c-flat to g’-flat (p. 107, m.6 after reh. =0): Naomi repeats the name on the same interval in reverse order.

The presence in this passage of oboe and harp playing melismas and the leitmotif signal Ruth’s "oriental" origin and perhaps stand for Moab. Naomi’s repetition of Ruth’s musical phrase on "Boaz" is a musical affirmation as well as a depiction of the "harmony" between the two women through Boaz.

Chapter 3

In the score, there is no break from the previous section. Naomi sings:

Hear my daughter, shall I not seek thy comfort, so that it may be well with thee? (3.1)

Ruth interrupts her in the only measure where their voices are heard together:

O where can I find rest to still the troubles, that like the sea are heaving within my heart?

After Ruth’s outburst, Naomi gives her instructions to Ruth (3.4). The final words of the instructions are sung entirely a capella and ad lib. (reh. =12): only two chords are played before a sustained measure of silence, before Naomi asks: “Ruth, art silent?” (p. 111, top). After another prolonged rest in the music, Ruth finally answers:

I listen trembling to thy bidding, but a flame is enkindled here within my bosom, my heart burns me! (p. 111, reh. =13)

This chromatic series of ascending phrases is sung to a steady increase in tempo and volume. When Ruth stops, there is a long rest, interrupted by the oboe and harp playing the leitmotif variant. “All that you sayest” (3.5; p. 111, 5th staff) is sung to very sparse accompaniment, and “I will do” is sung pp a capella, with a half measure of silence before the word “do.” Ruth sustains the word on g’ for another measure, while the orchestra comes in on an F major chord, in dissonance to the voice and anticipating the vocal descent to an F a measure later. The section ends peacefully resolved on an F major chord.

New elements found in this duet are overlapping voices and effective silences. When Ruth sings over Naomi’s voice, it is as if she couldn’t wait for Naomi to complete her sentence, so eager is she to proclaim her love. Naomi actually singing a phrase to the Ruth leitmotif I could be a musical suggestion of their closeness or even that Naomi is vicariously having Ruth’s experience.

The unaccompanied phrases and the two sustained rests combine to create a mood of both great intimacy and uncertainty. The half measure rest between Ruth’s “I will” and “do” indicates hesitation. Ruth’s continued sustaining of her g’ after the orchestra has come in on an F major chord are a final moment of suspension. Even once the chord is resolved in the voice, a sense of breathlessness and hesitation remain in the ear.

5. Threshing floor, nightfall. A priest is heard from a distance, intoning:

By day. O Lord, we praise thee. we praise thee. Lord, by night.

This is sung offstage, creating the effect of distance. The tune is a chant in the Phrygian mode. A chorus of “keepers of the temple” respond “Amen.”

The Priest continues with more prayers, followed by a very lengthy chorus that seems out of place in the oratorio, its purpose either to set a certain mood or simply to display virtuosity. Schumann apparently intended the scene to “picture the fancies which tortured
Ruth’s mind as she wandered alone by night to seek out Boaz” (Humiston, program notes: Appendix I, p. 265).

After this chorus, Ruth enters and sings:

Lord, thou alone knowest if my soul is walking in the right way. Go not from me, thee have I trusted. O my God, My soul, that once in darkness languished, is filled with radiance bright as Zion’s beams. Meseems, my heart goeth gently toward his heart. I do as was hidden me.

*Ruth does not pray for guidance in the Scroll, but this is in keeping with the more pious Ruth depicted in this oratorio. The reference to Zion is probably to remind the listener of Ruth’s connection to Israel.*

Boaz sings “Is there a woman at my feet there?” *a cappella* (p. 138, reh. #53). Flutes play rapid high cadences over *pizzicato* in the strings. His next line, “Speak, who art thou” (3.9; m.6 after reh. #53) follows the same pattern. Ruth answers “Master, I am Ruth” (reh. #54) to the opening part of her own leitmotif. After she tells him her purpose in coming (reh. #55), Boaz continues (p. 140, m.3):

May the Lord now bless thee, o my daughter. All that thou couldst give hast thou given, what thou givest is great as thou are faithful (paraphrased 3.10).

The word “daughter” is sustained for two measures, shifting from $c'$ to $b\flat$ (an interesting downward enharmonic shift) to $c''$. After Ruth responds, Boaz sings (p. 141, reh. #60):

Is not a virtuous woman most precious, and her price above rubies? (Prov. 31.10). Hast ravished my heart, my sister and my spouse. Tell me, how foundest thou the way to me? (Song of Songs 4.9, KJV)

The *Song of Songs* verses are sung as an unaccompanied recitative, followed by Ruth’s leitmotif in the orchestra, played *adagio con espressione*, over drums. Ruth responds after this short orchestral Interlude (p. 143, reh. #62):

I slept but my heart kept watch. Then I arose and went about the city, to seek for him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not; I called, but he answer’d me not. The watchmen that go about the city found me, to whom I said, have ye not seen him, whom my soul loveth? (Song of Songs 3.1-3).

This section begins as a quasi-recitative and with a few rare tonic moments—for example, E major is clearly heard (m.1, 3, 5 after reh. #62), as well as G major (reh. #63). There is a feeling of calm but from the phrase “I sought him” (p. 143, 3rd staff, m.3), the rhythm becomes slightly more agitated. Harp is included in the accompaniment.

Boaz continues (p. 144, reh. #64):

What is thy love above another? O thou fairest, fairest of women! O my beloved, thou art fair as the rose of Sharon, as the lily of the valleys (Song of Songs 2.1, but there it is spoken by the woman, in first person).

Ruth:

Tell me whither is my beloved turned aside? (Song of Songs 6.1; p. 146, top)

Boaz:

As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters. (Song of Songs 2.2; p. 146, reh. #66)
Ruth:
I charge you, ye watchmen of the town, tell my beloved if you find him, that I am sick of love (Song of Songs 5.8).

Boaz:
Lovely and fair is thy face, thy voice is sweetness. Fair as the rosy morning, and set apart like the sun are thou. O hark to the voice of thy beloved (mixed and combined verses from Song of Songs).

Ruth: I hear his voice, my beloved is mine, and I am his (2.16).

The Song of Songs verses express love within a biblical context.

This is the only moment the two voices come together and “touch.” Ruth’s word “his” (p. 148, 3rd staff) is sung on a d’, rising to d’= on the third beat; and on this beat, Boaz enters on a g, an octave and augmented fifth lower, creating a suspension. Boaz’s music in this duet is soaring, and in a much higher register than in the previous scene; the range is up to e’flat and hovers around c’.

The opening of this scene, when Boaz notices Ruth and flutes play high cadences, musically portrays excitement and mystery. The predominance of the harp throughout seems fitting for a setting of Song of Songs, possibly because of its association with the biblical David.

Both in the vocal range and in the text, this is a very different Boaz from the one portrayed earlier. The high range depicts ardor, though somewhat suppressed as expressed musically by the separation between their voices, which only blend for an instant in the entire duet. When Boaz’s music is relatively tonic, his keys are flatted, in contrast to Ruth’s; this musically paints a different character.

Boaz continues:
Now arise and come, and follow me. Thou hast ravished my heart my sister, o my sister and my spouse. Kiss me, o my spouse, with the kisses of thy mouth, love (Song of Songs 1.6, 2.13 and other verses; p. 149, reh. #69).

The phrase “Kiss me” is to be sung ff and molto espressivo e con moto. It starts on c’, rising to c’= and d’, before dropping and rising chromatically to c’= again (p. 149, 3rd, 4th staves). This note is held for five beats before abruptly dropping to d’, giving the effect of being cut off. The next measure is silent except for a single note in the horns, an orchestral exclamation point.

As the duet builds to a climax, ascending chromatic lines sung at the top of the baritone register seem to convey the concept of ecstasy. After this buildup, the sudden drop of the voice, which makes it sound almost cut off, makes it easy to visualize the kiss that follows.

A distant horn is heard. The horn solo was meant to represent the shofar, or ram’s horn (Humiston, program notes). The priest greets the rising sun, from a distance:
O give thanks unto the Lord.

Ruth says to Boaz:
Hearest thou the matin song of the priests? Let me now go from thee, that none may know that a woman came here to the floor (3.14, but there Boaz thinks this, it is not spoken).
Boaz doesn’t want her to go; he wants to tell everyone he is taking her to wife. They kiss again.

Chapter 4 6. Morning dawn: a chorus of priests and people sing a psalm of thanks to God.

As Ruth and Boaz sing more love verses, the chorus continues singing praises to God in the background.

_The libretto retains the language of the KJV Bible for non-biblical verses throughout this scene._

In Ruth’s final phrase, her music soars to b♭, never to the high c♮ it seems to anticipate. In the last section, soloists and chorus all sing Ruth’s leitmotif II (“Let me now follow you”).

The chorus closes with:

O give thanks unto the Lord our God.

**Summary**

There are several unusual features in this oratorio. Naomi’s role is greatly expanded, and she has two long solos—significantly, the work opens with her most extensive aria. For dramatic purposes, Schumann makes Naomi a towering, tragic figure in the opening scene. He tries to make Ruth larger than her biblical portrait by painting a woman of great passion. The spotlight shifts gradually from Naomi to Ruth and then to Ruth and Boaz, until Naomi vanishes from the final scenes.

Schumann’s extensive use of biblical texts differs from earlier composers and librettists because he does not rely so heavily on Psalms. He incorporates biblical texts such as Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs dramatically. These texts become part of the drama and an element of character portrayal.

Two interesting midrashic touches are the chorus that angrily turns against Naomi (found later in Berkeley: p 193), and the reference to a pledge made between Ruth and Naomi when they first met. These are interesting dramatic additions to the story, serving to explain motive. The oratorio ends with praise of God, as do all the oratorios in this thesis; in this case it seems to be a nod to public expectations, as in Franck.

Leitmotifs are used more extensively in this work than in any other I am analyzing. There are two associated with Ruth and one with Naomi. Their function is to continually remind the listener that Ruth’s initial act of following Naomi set the stage for everything that happened subsequently. Musically, the characters are clearly defined by different styles. Ruth’s vocal part and her accompaniment are higher and brighter than Naomi’s. Boaz’s music in his two scenes varies dramatically in style and range; it could almost be sung by two different singers.

Schumann’s style includes unusual intervals and dissonances; dramatic climaxes, often with high sung notes; syncopated rhythms to create excitement; effective use of silence, with sustained rests; and interesting tonal painting through pitch. The unusual instrumentation, including harp, drums, and tambourine, lend a Middle Eastern flavor to the score.

I libretto by I. L. Wohlman; copyright 1949 by both authors
Ruth—lyric soprano; Naomi—mezzo; Orpah—soprano; angel—alto; Boaz—dramatic tenor;
Gideon, Machlon, Chilion—all tenors; Elimelech—baritone; Tov—baritone

Joseph Rumshinsky’s (b. 1881, d. 1956) first music studies, in Vilna, Russia (now Lithuania), were with a cantor and at music conservatories. Most of his life was devoted to writing Yiddish music for the Second Avenue Theatre in New York.

The opera *Ruth* was his last work. He died before orchestrating it but had intended to do so (personal correspondence with his daughter Betty Fox, 11-19-01), and made a few instrumental notations in the piano score to which I will occasionally refer. He studied Hebrew with a private tutor before collaborating on the libretto with I. Wohlman (Betty Fox). Rumshinsky’s dream of seeing this work performed on stage in Israel was never realized. Later attempts to see it staged in Los Angeles all failed (Rumshinsky archives, UCLA Music Library).

The story opens before the beginning of the biblical story, with a birthday celebration for Elimelech in Moab, and the weddings of Machlon and Chilion to Ruth and Orpah (my translations throughout). I will cite the Hebrew text as transliterated in the score; the libretto was never written in Hebrew characters.

**Scene 1** *(Prologue)*: All praise and thank Chemosh, their god. Elimelech tells the story of their sojourn in Moab. Naomi sings (full text in Appendix I, p. 269):

In my dream [I saw] a sycamore with a wide trunk, its many wide branches penetrate the sky above, while its other parts drop down, and on a thin stalk at the top of the tree a small bird burst into song, a sad mournful song about the destruction of the fertile sycamore… I awoke and realized it was a dream, and the dream passed; and I cried bitterly over the fate of the sycamore.

*Rumshinsky’s midrashic use of a dream of a sycamore tree has particular resonance. These were the first trees planted in Tel Aviv only a year before Rumshinsky wrote his opera, and there are also a few biblical references to the sycamore, notably Ps. 78:47, where God destroyed the sycamore trees, Isa. 9:9, where the sycamore trees were cut down, and Amos 7:14, where he describes himself as a tender of sycamore fruit.*

A wedding scene follows, in which all join in a brindisi (drinking song). Naomi addresses her daughters-in-law:

Welcome, you are my daughters, I want to kiss you, my two gems. It seems to me that even in the heavens above they are playing the drums and timbrels. The stars gather and wink at the lovers.

*The purpose of this scene is partly to “open up” the story by depicting a scene that took place long before the opening of the biblical narrative. It might also be for the purpose of contrast with the scenes that follow.*

**Chapter 1 Scene 2** Two paupers on the road to Bethlehem talk about hunger and bread. One says he was a charioteer in the house of Elimelech the Elphai. They relate the story of the deaths of Elimelech and Chilion and their children. They’re headed for Bethlehem because the banquet is ready.

*By means of this device, the dialogue between these two characters essentially replaces 1.1-7, providing the necessary background for the story.*
The next scene is between Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. After Naomi tells Ruth and Orpah to return (1.8), Ruth responds:

Please do not cast me away; now that we have come here, we will rest by the roots of the sycamore with the broken branches.

Naomi responds in a recitative:

What is this? A repetition of the dream? Foolishly, my legs brought me here to see the interpretation of the dream.

This is followed by an aria:

Figure 23: Rumshinsky, "Ki kamoni kashikma" ("I am like the sycamore"), p. 81, 2nd staff

Ki kamoni kashikma sh'chol v'almon l'mot ishi uvanai Machlon v'Chiljon; ani m'leiah halachti v'reikam heshivani ja; rekam shakulah v'galmuda shava l'Betlehem Yehuda. Oy li umi yiten moti ki tov hamavet li mechayim.

I am like the sycamore, I lost my husband and my sons Machlon and Chilion; I went out full and God [translating "ja" as an alternate term for God] brought me back empty; and empty and lonely I return to Bethlehem in Judah. Who will give me death, because death is better than life for me.

*The only verse from the Scroll paraphrased here is 1.21. Naomi mentions her husband and the names of her sons, which she never does in the Scroll. And nowhere does she express a longing for death in the Scroll, so she is portrayed here as a far more depressed woman.*

This lament is in g minor with modal characteristics (g aeolian). It is in 4/4 time, marked *maestoso con dolore,* "majestically with sadness." A traditional funeral march rhythm marks the opening measures. The last part of the first sentence, starting with "rekam shakulah" (empty and lonely), is sung to a progression of alternating short unaccompanied phrases and an accompaniment echoing the descending figure (p. 82, m.2). The bass notes in the accompaniment descend chromatically. The second sentence reprises the opening theme before ending on a dominant (D7) chord (p. 82, final measure), anticipating a resolution in g minor.

*The combination of rhythm and modality creates a sense of great sadness, amplified by the effect of breathlessness and fatigue in Naomi's short broken phrases in the middle.*
The chromatic descent in the bass is typically a sound of grief. The piece ends on a seventh chord; there is no resolution in the music or for Naomi.

Ruth and Orpah respond:
Lo [i] [sic] galmda, at chamoti ki yano lach shayim
You’re not lonely, my mother-in-law, you have two daughters-in-law.

The two women take on the role of comforting Naomi, rather than simply stating that they want to go with her (1.10).

Instead of the expected g minor chord, Ruth enters (p. 82, last measure) singing d'' to f'' over Orpah’s h’, part of a diminished G7 chord which leads to e minor. There is ambiguity because of an A flat in the accompaniment. Under Ruth’s sustained notes, Orpah echoes both phrases a minor third lower, until their voices join in harmony at the close of each phrase (p. 83, 1”-2” staves). The chromatic and diminished third intervals in the accompaniment create tonal ambiguity throughout.

The lack of a tonal center creates a sense of unrest. Musically, Orpah is depicted as subservient to Ruth while also “in tune” with her, since her notes never create a dissonance as do the orchestra’s.

Naomi responds:
Shohna b’notai, shohna, haya niporedu uval t’lavuni vaderech asher ani holechet.

Return, my daughters, let’s separate, please don’t accompany me on the road I’m taking. I am like the autumn leaves that fall, while you are two blossoming springs in the garden of life. Come, we must part.

The theme of the tree can be glimpsed here in Naomi’s reference to autumn leaves.

Only now does the key finally modulate to e minor (aeolian). Naomi sings the same tune as at the opening of the scene, but a fourth higher and more dramatically. The word “ani” (1) is sung on g’”, the highest note sung to this point (p. 84, m.3). On the reference to “gan hachayim” (garden of life) there is a sudden momentary shift to C major (p. 85, m.2). Naomi repeats her earlier words “Hava nipareda uval t’lavumi” (Return, my daughters, let’s separate) over dramatic, hammering chords, reaching a’” flat, her highest note (p. 85, m.4). Singing the same tune in a higher key is an effective way to show an intensification rather than a change of feelings. This device is used twice in this short section. The “garden of life” is pictured musically in the bright, simple key of C major. There is a steady buildup of emotional intensity throughout, indicated in the rhythmic accompaniment and constantly changing tonality.

Ruth and Orpah continue:
Lo chamutki itach neilech. Lo na’azveich v’lo narpe mimeich ka’em hayit lanu ve’itach neilech.

We will not leave you and will not let you go, you have been like a mother to us, and we will come with you (1.10, paraphrased, p. 85, m.5-6).

Ruth enters on f’”. Naomi’s ending note. The tempo is marked più mosso (faster). The harmonies are striking—open fourths and fifths—both between the women’s voices and in the accompaniment. This is a reference to folk music in general, often more particularly to the Orient. Orpah again echoes Ruth’s voice, as she had earlier, but in different intervals.
Ruth singing Naomi’s note musically indicates closeness. Orpah is subservient to Ruth, echoing her thoughts.

Naomi responds with 1.11-13 slightly abridged, following which Ruth sings “Don’t urge me to leave you” (1.16-17):

The unusual setting of this text is highly dramatic, almost frenzied. It starts as an aria, but becomes a scene between Ruth and Naomi. The orchestra opens with a rapid repeated figure of 32nd notes, with an ostinato tremolo A in the bass, a drone punctuating each beat. Over this agitated accompaniment, Ruth’s opening phrase leaps an octave from e’ to e”, descends a half step to d’/#+ and another to d”. These modal characteristics (E-D#-D) give the phrase an “oriental” sound. The next phrase repeats this pattern, while the orchestra continues its hammering accompaniment.

Suddenly the orchestra plays a sustained dissonant chord (p. 94, m.7), followed by Ruth’s phrase “ameich ami” (your people are my people) sung unaccompanied on e”. The first word of the next phrase, “elohaich” (your God), is sung unaccompanied and ff on f’#/ (p. 95, m.2). The orchestra then plays a dissonant chord over Ruth’s voice as they ascend chromatically together on “elohai” (is my God) to g’#/ (m.4).

The opening of this aria is very dramatic. The setting of the crucial words “ameich ami,” “your people are my people” seems to stress Ruth’s isolation at the moment of her declaration, because her voice is unaccompanied at the start of that phrase. There is also a reference to the “dissonance” of the declaration because of the harshly dissonant chords that appear in the next phrase. But the fact that the voice continues to rise in pitch and volume throughout signifies Ruth’s great determination and confidence.

Naomi interrupts to ask (p. 95):

What has come over you to leave your god Chemosh and your birthplace to go after me and cling to this god, Shaddai.

This is an interesting addition to the Scroll, where Naomi never asks Ruth this question, nor does she ever mention the god Chemosh. The story makes more sense with this addition; it is only logical that Naomi would ask Ruth about her motives.

Ruth answers (p. 96):

The grace of your ways and the god of your people I have known. I am dead to Chemosh the idol of Moab and I have chosen the god of Naomi.

In addition to Ruth’s declaration of loyalty to Naomi’s God, this libretto adds Ruth’s explicit rejection of her own gods. This midrashic addition could be explained by the Jewish orientation of the composer and presumably the librettist.
Naomi responds (p. 97, m.3):

Al na Ruth al na bini, shuvi l’artzeeh l’ameeh u’elohayic

Please Ruth, my daughter, go back to your land, your people, and your god.

*In this libretto there is no reference to “your mother’s house” (1.8). Naomi’s words here foreshadow the second part of Ruth’s pledge (1.17).*

The key suddenly shifts to C♯ major for this phrase, which has the same tune (a leitmotif) and modality as Naomi’s previous aria. Naomi sings the last phrase on repeated g♯s, an overtone of C♯. This would be vocally difficult and might render the text incomprehensible.

Rumshinsky has written the melody into the orchestra, but did not double it in the voice, which he is treating instrumentally in this phrase.

*This very dramatic phrase is like a strong admonishment to Ruth.*

Ruth continues with the biblical text of 1.16-17, which was started before the dialogue with Naomi (p. 97, 4th staff):

Al tif’i vi lashuv meachrayic basher tamuti amut v’sham ekaver...[through beini uvenech].

On the last phrase, “Ki hamavet...” (Only death will part you and me) (p. 98, m.6), the vocal line ascends as the orchestra doubles the voice and plays a high tremolo. The last sung note is a sustained g♯ with an optional c♯ also marked (p. 99, top). This is to be held five measures, while the orchestra hammers out the main theme alternating with rapid descending 16th-note phrases. The aria ends on a dissonant chord.

*This highly dramatic and vocally difficult ending indicates that Rumshinsky had a dramatic soprano in mind for Ruth. This ending phrase would express virtual emotional frenzy.*

Ruth continues with a much longer aria, a midrashic expansion of 1.16-17 and opening with the same phrase she used earlier in the scene:

Please do not drive me away (לא למדיח). Naomi, don’t cast me out of the heritage of God, for I am a daughter of El Shaddai and the people of Israel; don’t drive me away, for since the day I came to sit in the shadow of your doorway like a branch, your love covered me, and I felt this came to me from El Shaddai, the god who hides in the depths of the sky. I will leave the filth of Moab and the believers in man-made stone and wood idols, and quietly raise my hands to El Shaddai...

*The Jewish orientation of the librettist and composer are visible again, in phrases like “the filth of Moab” (related to “Chemosh the abomination of Moab” in 1 Kin. 11.7 and 2 Kin. 23.13) and references to “believers in man-made stone and wood idols” which recall prophetic utterances (for example, Is. 37.19). There is also a reference to the theme running throughout the work, that of a tree and its branches, standing for the family that has lost, and will regain, its “branches.”*

Scene Three opens with the Bethlehem crowd singing:

Here they come, here they are singing. Naomi with a friend of the Moabites.

*In the Scroll, the crowd does not even acknowledge the presence of Ruth, let alone identify her as a Moabite; nor does Naomi (1.19).*

“Tov” steps forward to identify himself as Elimelech’s brother. He recognizes Naomi as the widow whom he hasn’t seen in 11 years. Naomi sings a greeting to the city of her birth,
her “beloved city.” When they all greet her as Naomi, she sings “Don’t call me Naomi” (1.20):

Figure 25 Rumshinsky, “Al tikrena li Nomi” (Don’t call me Naomi), p. 112

Don’t call me Naomi, call me Mara; every disaster, plague and trouble overcame me. Because Shaddai made it bitter for me, what else can happen?

The text is from the Scroll, with two interjections about disaster and plague, and a resigned and bitter final question. She does not continue with 1.21, probably because that verse was paraphrased earlier, in her dialogue with Ruth.

This lament is in 12/8 time (very slow and broad) and a-flat minor, both unusual markings. The melody is played first in the orchestra and then repeated three times in the aria; the middle repeat is sung higher, in d-flat minor. The closing measures, two repeats of “umah lachen od” (what else can happen) (p.113, m.5-6), are a series of descending minor thirds or augmented seconds and a phrase dipping down to b-flat before ending quietly in E-flat major. The sense of calm from this final chord is immediately shattered by loud chromatic ascending chords leading to Tov’s public recognition of Naomi.

The insistent accompaniment features repeated descending half-steps, a sighing effect heightened by the slow, dragging beat. The device of repeating a tune in a higher key has been seen elsewhere; it serves to increase the excitement. The many flats and descending figures at the conclusion all portray great sadness and loss of hope.

Responding to questions about Ruth, Naomi tells the people:

Ruth, after the death of her husband, left her father and mother and came with me to Bethlehem; we came together in the shadow of the wings of the God of Israel.

While in the Scroll neither Naomi nor the people seem to even notice Ruth’s presence at her side, here Naomi not only recognizes but even praises Ruth’s actions. The people bless Ruth, saying she will be at Naomi’s side “like the tree in spring which keeps alive and renews its leaves” (paraphrase of Ps. 1.3), another reference to the central themes of the tree and renewal (this chap., pp. 165, 167).

Then Ruth and Naomi sing a duet, how one is the leaves to the other’s tree, and they are each other’s hope.

Both sing:
Your happiness is my happiness, your peace is my peace. You are the bird in my dream. You are like a daughter of my birth.
Chapter 2  Scene Four: Afternoon in Boaz’s field.

The chorus sings about the harvest. When they leave, Gidon (the head reaper’s name in this libretto) stays behind. Ruth arrives, tells him who she is and that she is there to glean. He tells her she is beautiful, then serenades her (full text in Appendix I, p.269):

In truth and not in dreams I have come to you, maiden: my name is Gidon, master of Boaz’s house, son of Salmah the judge. I am the head of the reapers in the fields... Come Ruth, and with me you will live...

The only rationale for the head reaper to be attracted to Ruth is to create a love triangle, in keeping with the genre of grand opera to which Rumanovsky aspired.

Boaz enters with his workers. After Gidon tells him who Ruth is, Boaz tells her where to glean (2.8-9). The rest of the scene is taken up with chorus and soloists singing about their work and nature.

Act 3 opens with Naomi singing to God as she grinds grain:

This text makes Naomi a more religious figure, who now thanks God whom she blamed for her earlier misfortunes. In addition, she seems to know everything that has happened and will happen to Ruth before Ruth even comes home.

This aria (p. 205) is based on a modal scale. The middle beat of each measure is a rapid figure of 16th notes, almost a trill, over which Naomi sings a slower melody (m.7). This melody has a lamenting sound: the voice ascends a fifth and descends a half-step. Naomi begins talking about Ruth (p. 208) in a recitative accompanied only by a tremolo. On the word “v’hinei” (“and now look;” m.4), the accompaniment becomes a group of 16th note arpeggios with the soaring melody doubled in the accompaniment.

In the next section (p. 210), “Eile hagarinim” (“These are the seeds”), the key is D major and the tempo increases (m.5). In the next few phrases, the same musical figure is repeated a step higher each time. The closing section returns to the opening melody and key of the aria (p. 211). On the last ascending fifth, the voice remains on the fifth rather than descending a half-step as in all previous ascending fifths in the aria (3rd staff). The voice
sustains a c' for the final three measures, and the final pp chord in the accompaniment is an open fifth of F-C.

The trill-like accompaniment at the opening of this aria has the sound of a rapid pulse, indicating Naomi's anxiety. The pattern of ascending or descending fifths throughout, coupled with many dissonant moments, create an unsettled and sad mood. But the change in tone from mourning to hope comes after the measure in which Naomi seems to imagine Boaz's speech. The transition to the bright D major and the steadily higher pitches show Naomi's increased excitement from that point on.

Ruth enters; they greet one another, and Naomi says she is glad Ruth returned, and comments on how tired she must be. Ruth answers:

Lo ayafti ki im ahavti, hoi kama ahavti. Hoi cim y'kara ve'nishmat chayai, hamimeich et sa'arot nafshi astira, hoi Naomi kayam nigrash l'vavi.

I didn't tire, because I loved, oh how I loved. O my dear mother, breath of my life, from you I will hide the agony of my soul. O Naomi, my heart is torn like the sea.

Naomi responds:

Shvii biti ul'nafsheich hasara sheket avi. Im libeich kayam nigrash, ani hasira sirat mifrash.

Sit, my daughter. I will bring peace to your tormented soul. If your heart is ripped like the sea, I will be the boat.

An interesting element of this dialogue is the imagery of the split sea (Ex. 14.21-22), with Naomi as the boat to bring them across. An oblique reference to the splitting of the Reed Sea is possible, and seems an attempt to place the story of Ruth and Naomi in the context of the nation's history.

The fact that Ruth and Naomi both refer to Ruth's soul as "in agony" and "tormented" is an attempt to turn this into a melodramatic moment appropriate to the genre of grand opera.

Ruth's opening phrase, "lo ayafti" (p. 213, m.4), goes to a'. On "ki im ahavti" ("I loved"), the tempo slows and the phrases are sung in short descending phrases, partly a capella with the orchestra echoing some of Ruth's notes.

The accompaniment abruptly slows when the key changes to d minor (p. 215, m.4), with thumping notes in the bass. Naomi's words (from "shvii biti," "sit, my daughter," m.5) are sung as a recitative over single sustained chords alternating with the pattern of low repeated notes.

The opening section of Ruth's music, with its short descending phrases, conveys a sense of breathlessness. The thumping accompaniment later in the duet simulates a heartbeat slowing down. There is interesting contrast here between the two women as portrayed in their vocal parts.

Ruth continues:

I love Boaz, I only thought to glean in his field. He said nothing of his love for me but the burning irises of his eyes have become the dream of my life, and all the parts of his body and movement of his height and strength spoke of his love, without saying it.

In this midrashic re-telling, Ruth has fallen in love with Boaz, and this is no elderly man as some midrashists have suggested, but rather a tall, strong, and presumably virile one. And based on his body language, Ruth assumes he returns her love. The inclusion of a
physical description underlines the importance of the visual element in this work, meant to be
performed onstage by singers who could convincingly play these roles as written here.
Naomi tells her Boaz is the redeemer (2.20):
Don’t be ashamed. When you came to his field you did not yet know the secret of who
he was; and this came from the God of Israel.
Naomi also mentions God in the Scroll after Ruth tells her about Boaz (2.20).

Chapter 3

The scene ends after 3.4. Naomi tells Ruth what to do (3.1-4), then again tells Ruth she is
like her own daughter. Ruth responds with a passionate declaration “My mother, Naomi” (similar
passages are in Fino p. 144).

Scene 6: The Threshing Floor

The scene opens with Boaz, who has a dream, or vision, in which an angel appears
and sings:
A hundred women spread a net: an arrow flew from the bow, you didn’t freeze from
the frost or burn from the flame. And behold Ruth the Israelite woman.

Boaz interjects and corrects the angel: “Ruth the Hebrew.”

The angel continues.
Tonight a halakic judgment has been made: [the law intends] male Ammonite, not
female: Moabite male, not female. I was sent down from above to announce this to
you.

The angel vanishes and Boaz sleeps.

This unusual midrashic addition could be made only by Jewish writers, since it quotes
the halakic midrash (BT Yebamot 47b) explaining why Ruth, from the accursed Moabite
tribe (Lev. 23.4: אֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּתָם וְהַמְּחַהֵל הָרָא הַמְּלָאכָה לְרָא הָאָרֶץ) “No Ammonite or Moabite male shall be
admitted into the congregation of the Lord”), was deemed acceptable as a wife for Boaz (and
as the progenitor of David).

Ruth enters and prays to the God of Israel for strength and courage. When she lies at
Boaz’s feet and he awakens, she identifies herself and sings:
I hurried to come and ask something of the judge.

Boaz answers:
I am indeed a judge in Israel: what is your question?

This addition makes Boaz sound more like a judge than a lover; he does not take on
the role of judge in the Scroll until chapter 4.

Ruth continues (p. 248, last measure):
Halo ishi Mahlom met b’eretz Moav abanim ein lo l’hakim sh’mo al nachlatay
l’ma’an lo yimache shmo...v’im ani matzati chein b’amecha utarata knafecha al
amatecha, v’lo yikareit sheim hameit mi Yisrael, ki ata hagoeil.
My husband Mahlon died in the land of Moab, and he had no sons to carry his name for his inheritance; so that his name should not be erased...so if I have pleased you, my lord, please spread your wings over your handmaid (3.9) so the name of the deceased should not be erased from Israel, for you are the redeemer (3.9)

Ruth is spelling out what she wants from Boaz much more explicitly here than in the Scroll, where Ruth never mentions Mahlon's name. In the Scroll, Boaz mentions Mahlon's name in 4.9-10, where he explains how taking Ruth as his wife will perpetuate his name. In other words, in this libretto Ruth's words to Boaz pre-empt his speech to the whole community.

This section, to be sung ff and con furoso [sic], lies in a high tessitura, reaching a' + and with several a' flats, and most notes above f'$. This range might obscure some of the text (ch. 4, p. 92). Ruth's final words, “ata hagoeil” (“you are the redeemer”), are sung twice, over a tremolo accompaniment: the first time, the phrase descends chromatically from a' flat to f'#: the second is a modal descent of an augmented second, from f'' down to e' flat, during a big rallentando. The key modulates unexpectedly to G major for Boaz's entrance (p. 250, last measure):

Bruch at l'adonai biti, al tiri kol asher tomri elai c’eseh lach.

You are blessed to God my daughter, do not fear. I will do all you asked (based on 3.10-11).

The opening word takes the voice to g', taking advantage of the optimum range for a tenor. The accompaniment is simple, repetitive high arpeggios which descend chromatically to a different tonality in every measure (p. 251). A very similar pattern is found in a section near the end of the opera (p. 339).

A sense of suspension and ambiguity in Ruth's opening words is created through the use of augmented chords, which sound further from resolution than a simple dominant seventh chord would. Chromaticism and modality are used to convey emotion in many of these passages.

Ruth proclaims her love for Boaz, and in a duet to be sung “con amore,” he tells her of his own love for her (they both sing the same words: p. 255):

Ani ahavtech vehi leiv ahavtech Ruth, uva'adonai mivtach ki ani hagoeil (ata hagoeil)

With all my heart I love you, and swear by God that I am the redeemer (Ruth: you are the redeemer).

Rumshinsky uses extensive chromaticism in this love duet. Boaz opens with an ascending chromatic figure: Ruth joins him on his last note and continues the ascending pattern. This pattern is repeated twice, taking Ruth to a' on “leiv” (“heart”). The duet continues with Ruth's entrances always “stepping on” the final notes of Boaz's phrases.

Chromaticism is often used, as here, to express the most passionate feelings. Ascending chromatic lines also express eagerness, which can be seen in Ruth, who seems so eager to repeat what Boaz says that she cannot wait until he finishes.

The second part of the duet (p. 259) is accompanied initially by high arpeggios over sustained sung notes, the arpeggios dropping to a lower register while the orchestra doubles the high vocal line. Boaz sings:
Deep in my heart I buried this love. My lips ("ishfatajim" in the score, misreading הָפָצָא, "rəfatajim") are burning like coal.

I closed it in a secret place, until the love burst forth like fire. Who will calm it? Could all the waters of the Jordan? (Song of Songs 8.6 paraphrased)

These verses, through a few key words, evoke the Song of Songs. This is not the only libretto to use or imitate these verses for a Ruth-Boaz duet (see Schumann, this chap., p. 162). Their love is placed on a different plane by being expressed in biblical language.

In this part of the duet, the voices follow one another less; they sing together, in tonal harmony but not identical melodic lines. In some places the voices echo each other’s lines (p. 260, end-p. 261, top). The range of the duet is quite high, hovering (for Boaz) between c’ and a’ flat, and higher still for Ruth, utilizing the tenor and soprano ranges. The key modulations are virtually hidden under the chromaticism and dissonance. The duet ends with Ruth singing g’’ in harmony with Boaz’s b’ over a dissonant augmented triad A-flat-C-F in the high orchestra parts (p. 265, top). The maestoso (majestic) orchestral conclusion ends on four heavily accented G’’s.

The accompaniment found at the opening of this section seems to express rapture. The effect of Ruth and Boaz singing sometimes together, sometimes apart, is of two distinct people blending their feelings. The potential of the tenor voice for expressing romantic fervor is fully utilized here. His ending note of b’ is near the top end of the tenor range and its sound is inevitably dramatic and thrilling. The conclusion of this duet is a musical expression of ecstatic union.

Chapter 4 Scene 7: At the city gate

The crowd addresses Gidon, wanting to know why the elders were suddenly summoned to the gate. He answers:

No bull attacked a cow, and no man was attacked by stones by accident. And the drowsy elders have been called here to make a judgment.

These are oblique references to laws found in the Torah (variants found in Exod. 21.13, 21.35), placing the scene in a “biblical” context.

Gidon explains the situation with Ruth, and who might redeem her, and expresses sadness at not being the man. This makes it apparent that he has either lost interest in Ruth or realized the situation offered him no hope. Boaz appears and explains the situation, then waxes poetic:

Can a man look at blooming roses and his heart sing like a violin? Will he not be happy at the desire of a girl filled with light who spread her rays on me last night?

Boaz’s language here could not be further from his cool and legalistic language in chapter 4 of the Scroll. The librettist’s focus is on Boaz the lover, not the clever manipulator.

The chorus joins Boaz in reciting this love poem. The elders enter and explain that the other redeemer is Tov. When Ruth hears that, she cries out “Oi va voy li” (a modern Hebrew expression of dismay that comes from Yiddish, which would have been understood by the Yiddish-speaking audience Rumshinsky had always written for). The chorus comments on her pain.

"There are also biblical examples of this term. The word "88 (voy) appears 24 times in the Hebrew Bible; 2 in Numbers, 2 in 1 Sam., 4 in Isa., 8 in Jer., 4 in Ezek., 2 in Hosea, 1 each in Prov. and 1 Am. It is used together with "55 (mei) only in 6 cases: 2 in Isa., 4 in Jer. The term "88 appears only once, in Prov. 23.29 (together with "55). Rumshinsky may have been referring obliquely to these biblical occurrences."

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In the Scroll’s chapter 4, neither Naomi nor Ruth is present, while here they feature prominently. By eliminating 4.5-6, where the redeemer refuses to redeem Ruth along with her land, the librettist has created a conflict between Boaz and Tov for dramatic effect. The conflict is complicated further by the open expressions of love between Boaz and Ruth, with Naomi and the people also siding with the lovers.

Ruth cries out to the God of Israel, to have pity, not to let her commit a lie in her soul by lying with Tov. She proclaims she and Boaz love each other, and sings:

It would be like prostituting myself. I would rather be dead in the grave.

The Head of Elders explains that according to their law Ruth belongs to Tov (levirate law, in Deut. 25), and invites him to present his side.

Tov, upholding his legal rights, sings:
Don’t cover my face with shame. You all heard from the mouth of the Head Elder who stated the law.

Ruth responds in a wail: “Alli lai li oili vavoili.”

Naomi says to Tov:

Listen, brother of my husband Elimelch, a woman without love in a house is the source of all trouble to her husband, she is pain and disaster, a snake in the house is she. Please, take the field for no money, look. I am giving you the field for free. Tov: just leave Ruth alone.

Tov responds:

I wouldn’t want charity. If I have Ruth I will keep her on my hands like the apple of my eye.

Ruth again responds “Oi v’avo li.” Tov says he wants to hear what the elders say; he doesn’t want to incur sin by bringing Ruth home.

A dramatic scene has been created here by the device of Tov refusing to relinquish his rights to Ruth. Naomi is arguing with him. Ruth is wailing about her misfortune, and the suspense builds towards a climax. None of this is in the Scroll, but to set chapter 4 as a dramatic scene required some kind of additions.

Boaz interrupts this discussion:

I didn’t come here today in sin, but because this night I saw an angel in my dream.

He relates his dream to everyone in an aria. “Ra’iti mal’ach” (“I saw an angel”), concluding with “Ammonite male, not female; Moabite male, not female.”

Gidon says: “A messenger from on high was sent to Boaz.”

They are all convinced Boaz is the true redeemer, based on the angel in his dream. Boaz tells them they are all witnesses this day, that he has purchased all that was Elimelch’s, Chilion’s and Machlon’s (4.9).

The chorus sings, with Naomi:

Blessed is God who did not withhold a redeemer and did not erase the name of your son Machlon in Israel. (4.14)
The first part of this phrase is said by the women only in the Scroll, and after Ruth has given birth. Instead of “has not withheld a redeemer from you,” the libretto phrase has “did not erase the name of your son Machlon,” a subtle difference that reminds the audience what this marriage will accomplish for Naomi and for Elimelech’s house.

Naomi expresses gratitude at the judgment of the elders. The Chief Elder says it was the judgment of the heavenly messenger.

Naomi continues:

Blessed is my God who brought me here today to hear the interpretation of my dream: Ruth and Boaz, take each other’s hand.

The libretto includes a wedding scene, presided over by Naomi and with Ruth’s active participation. This is a major change from the terse narrative of the Scroll’s chapter 4. It also brings the drama full circle from the opening scene, which was also a wedding.

Ruth sings (p. 337, 3rd staff):

Ve’erastani Boaz l’olam, b’chesed uv’rahaim. hein miyom harishon li b’sadecha katal hiratta alan et chasdecha.

I wed you, Boaz, for eternity, in kindness and compassion. From the first day, your kindness fell on me like dews.

In Hebrew: (ואָרַשְׁתִּי בָּאָז לְולָם בְּכַסֵּד וּבְרָחָא מִיָּמוֹנָא חַד בְּכַסֵּדִי קַתָּל הִרְאֲטֵתָא אָלָּא אֶת חַאוֹדְא)

This is almost a verbatim copy of Hosea 2.21:

ואָרַשְׁתִּי לְולָם וּאָרַשְׁתִּי לְבֶקֶטִים וּבְכַסֵּדִים וּבְרָחָא

These verses are recited during the ritual of putting on tefillin (phylacteries), which expresses love and faithfulness between the Jewish people and their god. This liturgical use of the verses grew from the belief that they refer to God’s betrothal to Israel. Both librettist and composer were surely aware of these allusions, and were elevating Ruth and Boaz’s marriage to the realm of Israel’s historic covenant with God.

This, Ruth’s final solo, is marked allegretto con anima and is marked by successively wider ascending interval leaps—a sixth, seventh, then octave. The accompaniment is a series of very rapid arpeggios under the soaring vocal line. The opening melody returns on the last page of this aria (p. 339); after the octave leap, a’ to a’’ (m.4), the voice descends chromatically to finally end in one of the few clearly tonic moments, in D major.

This chromatic descent was heard earlier in Boaz’s aria (p. 251). This conclusion therefore links them together with the same ecstatic theme.

Boaz says to Ruth, with the chorus repeating his words:

Our hearts cling together, we will march towards our future in the trail of strength just as the bird prophesied.

The librettist brings back the metaphor of the bird heard in the first scene, but since Boaz was not present in that scene, the listener must imagine they all share a similar vision.

The closing chorus, led by Gidon, sings:

On all the nations of the world, a new light will shine.

(על כל העמים אור חדש יהיה)
Summary

There are many original elements in this opera. The story opens earlier than the Scroll narrative, an interesting example of gap-filling. The central theme of a tree, its branches and birds, is first found here when Naomi relates a dream vision. This theme could be associated with the biblical theme of land that is central in the Scroll and is an example of a literary leitmotif (ch. 2, p. 38). The Jewish orientation of the composer (and probably librettist) shows itself in references to the “filth” of Moab, and to talmudic and biblical passages. The librettist has created love triangles in two places, one in the field with Gideon approaching Ruth, and one in the final scene, when the redeemer, here named Tov, does not want to relinquish his right to take Ruth. This creates dramatic conflict which Rumshinsky probably felt was necessary in an opera.

Musically this is also a very unusual work. Modality features significantly, probably a result of Rumshinsky’s early training in Eastern Europe, as well as his many years writing for Yiddish theatre. That music would also have incorporated modal sounds. In addition to modality, Rumshinsky uses chromaticism and dissonance very effectively to heighten dramatic moments.

In a few highly dramatic spots, the vocal part involves singing repeated notes in a very high range of the voice, which could obscure the text. This suggests that the composer placed higher value on conveying emotional passion than on having every word of the text understood.

Wilfrid Mellers, The Song of Ruth, cantata

Words written and arranged from The Book of Ruth by R. J White

Alfred Lengnick & Co., Ltd., 1950

Ruth—soprano; Naomi—mezzo; Boaz—baritone (no Orpah);
Narrator—solo voice or chorus

Wilfrid Mellers’ (b. England, 1914) early work was influenced by the Baroque, but this changed with his increased interest in the music of other cultures (Leslie East in New Grove, vol. 16, 350). He wrote The Song of Ruth as a piece suitable for amateur choral societies. It was performed numerous times shortly after its publication, in modest, mostly provincial productions (Mellers, personal communication, 29.1.2003). Though this analysis is based on a piano score, there are instrument notations throughout, to which I will refer.

Chapter 1 “The Road to Bethlehem”

The Chorus in 4-part harmony opens with:

The women mourn in the land of Moab for the sons of Judah and their wives mourn with the mother (pp. 2-3).

Though other librettos have set scenes that took place before the Scroll narrative actually starts, this one is unique is starting with a Greek chorus communting on the mourning of the women in Moab. It is also a sort of synopsis of the events recounted in the Scroll’s 1.1-7.

Naomi continues (p. 5, 3rd staff):
Let each depart unto her own people. Tarry not for me my daughters for I am old. I have no more sons to give you. Let each depart unto her own people and I will return into Judah.

These verses summarize 1.11-13. The librettist has altered "each to her mother's house" (1.8) to "unto her own people." In the Scroll, the narrator mentions returning to the land of Judah (1.7), but Naomi never does.

The tonality shifts throughout these passages. There are several descending fifths and sevenths, including a major seventh, in the voice (p. 5, 3rd-4th staves), while the strings play ascending and descending chromatic figures (3rd staff). The first clearly tonic chord, in e-flat minor, appears on the word "old" (p. 5, 4th staff, m.3). The opening melody is repeated a half-step lower (p. 6, m.4), leading to the word "return," which is sung on an octave leap, e'flat to e''flat which is then held for 2 1/2 measures (p. 6, 2nd staff, m.4) before ending on "Judah" on e'flat with trombones playing e-flat minor chords under the voice.

Musical effects suggesting sadness in this short aria are the flattening of the E that dominated the previous section, and the many descending intervals. The closing trombone chords create a somber effect.

Ruth now sings "Intreat me Not" (1.16-17):

Figure 26: Mellers. "Intreat me not," p. 7

This aria is in E-flat major, a contrast to Naomi's e-flat minor. As in Naomi's aria, the orchestra echoes Ruth's phrases. But here, rather than doubling the voice, the instruments and voice weave around each other, mostly in consonance, sometimes completely in dissonance with one another. One example of dissonance is the word "people" (p. 7, 4th staff, m.3), sung on f' anticipating the next note, e'flat; the orchestra sustains an E flat throughout that cadence. The most dissonant moment is notably on the word "death," where the vocal part has g'' against the orchestra's g''''flat (p. 8, 4th staff, m.2).

The aria also has strikingly wide leaps for the voice: "Thy people shall be my people" leaps a ninth from e'flat to f'' on "my" (p. 7, last measure), while "thy God" ascends a tenth, from e'flat to g''''flat (p. 8, m.2). The words on these higher pitches are also more sustained than the rest of the text, which is mostly sung on eighth and quarter notes. The aria ends on e'flat, an octave lower than it started, and with the same somber e-flat minor chords in the trombones that ended Naomi's previous aria.

The E major opening of this aria musically depicts a sharp contrast to Naomi's e-minor, portraying Ruth's more positive outlook. There is a sense of restlessness and excitement in the changing rhythms and wide vocal leaps. The dissonance of Ruth's G natural against the G flat in the accompaniment on "death" is almost a musical struggle.
between the major and minor keys. In the closing measures, e-flat minor wins the struggle. Singing in Naomi’s key, accompanied by the same somber trombone chords, Ruth is sharing Naomi’s sorrow.

In place of 1.18, where Naomi does not respond to Ruth, after the aria the narrator (alto solo) sings (p. 10):

And Naomi held her daughter to her heart and kissed her.

*In the Scroll, Naomi only kisses the two women together, as a parting gesture (1.9). Here, she kisses Ruth out of affection, in place of the silence with which she responds to Ruth’s pledge in the Scroll (1.18).*

Before Naomi’s aria “Call me not Naomi” (Fig. 27; 1.20-21) the narrator (solo) sings:

*This description of a gesture, not found in the Scroll, suggests Naomi’s feelings of shame or her wish to not be seen.*

The orchestral introduction to “Call me not Naomi” (p.10, m.2) opens with an ostinato B flat in a low register; over this, a rising chromatic, dissonant figure heading for B flat is played by horns (m.3), then trumpets (m.5), with a steady trill played on B flat in the horns throughout. The volume and pitch increase steadily up to Naomi’s opening phrase.

*The use of brass and dissonance makes this an ominous and very dramatic buildup to the aria. A sense of increasing excitement derives from the directional nature of the dissonant melody, which is heading for B flat.*

![Figure 27: Mellers. “Call me not Naomi,” p. 10, 3rd staff](image)

The 8th note immediately preceding Naomi’s opening f’’’ is a dissonant chord of e’ against f’’, another example of two pitches struggling for dominance. Naomi’s opening words are sung forte but immediately descend from the starting pitch of f’’. The word “Naomi” ends on e’’, and “call me” on the next beat starts on d’ flat, an enharmoni c shift that in notation lowers the pitch without actually doing so.

*This setting of Naomi’s words is more jagged and angry-sounding than others (Rumshinsky’s and Franck’s settings, for example, are poignant), which usually reflect grief more than anger. Wide leaps alternate with chromatic passages. Above the vocal line, the orchestra plays a different melody line, much of it utilizing trumpets in a high range. This could potentially drown out Naomi’s words sung in the middle register, but at the same time the piercing trumpet sound greatly intensifies the mood. There is also a*
continual ostinato in the bass that descends an octave chromatically from the starting B flat (p. 10, 3rd-4th staves).

The aria does not really "end." The last measures are marked *fortissimo* and the words "And the Almighty hath afflicted me" (p. 11, 2nd staff) are marked as heavily accented notes ranging between \( f' = \) and \( a''/flat \), before leaping down a diminished seventh to \( b' \). Even with the sparse and low-range orchestral accompaniment under this phrase, some singers might have problems projecting text in that range.

The descending line in the opening measures signifies pessimism or sadness. The enharmonic shift before the reference to "Mara" subtly anticipates Naomi's reference to bitterness. This bitterness can be heard in the pounding descending chromatic notes under her voice. Even though the singer's words might be obscured by the high and loud notes she must sing at the end, the effect is a Naomi almost crazed by anger and grief.

After this aria, the women's chorus sings (p. 11). "The women mourn in the land of Moab," followed by a mournful, wordless chorus "Ah," like a wail (p. 12).

**Chapter 2  "The Harvest Field"**

After some sung narration and a male chorus, Boaz addresses Ruth (2.8-9, 2.14). She responds (p. 19, last measure):

Why have I found grace in thine eyes, O Boaz? Why hast thou shown favor unto me, a stranger out of Moab? Why hast thou comforted me and spoken kindly unto thy handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens (2.10, 2.13)

*The libretto combines two verses, skipping Boaz's words that come between them (2.11-12). It also changes "foreigner" to "stranger out of Moab," echoing the reference to Ruth's origins found in the opening chorus (above).*

Ruth's music in these measures is marked by constantly fluctuating time signatures: measures alternate restlessly between 5 4, 3 4, 4 4, even 7/8 time. Some words are sung to sparse accompaniment, while others have rapid and wildly irregular high-pitched patterns in the background. There are rapid *melismas* in flute and clarinet (p. 20, 2nd staff) that have a dissonant and modal quality; for example, c-natural in the strings against e\( \text{#} \) in the flutes (2\textsuperscript{nd} staff, m.2) and c-natural in the voice against e\( \text{#} \) in the flutes (4\textsuperscript{th} staff, m.1).

*The fluid rhythmic patterns and vocal leaps against the melismatic accompaniment create a vivid musical portrait of nervousness and excitement. The high melismas, with their modal sound, might be an attempt at "orientalizing," as they appear around the reference to Moab.*

While Boaz instructs his reapers about leaving extra grain for Ruth (2.15-16), Naomi sings at the same time, over the chorus (p. 22, last measure):

The Lord God hath moved the heart of Boaz my kinsman and he shall comfort Ruth my daughter.

*Including Naomi at this point in the story gives the impression she is also in the field, observing what has happened between Ruth and Boaz. (Rumshinsky's work used a similar device: p. 171).*

The scene closes with everyone singing together (p. 30):

Blessed be the name of the Lord.
Chapter 3  “The Threshing Floor.”

Naomi and Ruth’s dialogue (3, 1-5) opens the scene, followed by a mixed chorus singing:

Long, long ago when Ruth came into Boaz side, and laid her down, there to abide, no more from thence to go (pp. 35-36).

This is an interesting use of time-jumping from the present to the distant past, then back to the present. The language imitates that of a fairy-tale.

Ruth enters immediately after the chorus, singing the short phrase:

Behold thy handmaid Ruth (3.4, p. 37, 2nd staff, m.2).

This phrase takes Ruth from f' to a' flat, then abruptly descends a tenth to f'.

This is a musical depiction of breathless excitement.

Boaz continues with 3.10-12, inserting an additional verse (p. 38, 1st staff):

Of thine gentleness art kind to me, as thou wast kind to Naomi thy mother (refers back to 2.11).

Fear not, for all my people know that thou art a virtuous woman. Tarry here this night, and on the morrow I shall do to thee a kinsman’s part, requiting all thy loss.

There is no real home key in this section. On the word “mother” (p. 38, 3rd staff), there is a clear C major chord, followed by two measures of dissonant chords. After this, Boaz sings “Fear not” (3rd staff, m.4) against a C major chord played by oboes, clarinets, and trumpets. But even against a continual tremolo on C, pitches alien to its scale (such as C#) constantly intrude (4th staff). The section moves dynamically from mf at the start to f at the end.

The steadily increasing dynamic range together with the relatively high note of e', and the constant pull both to and away from the bright C major, all indicate increasing emotional excitement and suspense.

There is a tempo marking of molto calmo before Ruth responds (p. 39, 3rd staff):

Glad is the heart of Ruth; and my tongue shall praise the Lord for all his favor unto me, that he did move the heart of Boaz to my aid. Blessed be God and his servant Boaz.

In the Scroll, Ruth does not address Boaz again in this scene; her only words are in 3.9. In this libretto she not only expresses joy, but also gratitude to God (twice).

This phrase opens on a sung g', in C major though with the intrusion of dissonant notes. The accompaniment is in the strings, contrasting with the winds and brass that played under Boaz. The rhythm is excited and upbeat. There are chant-like elements to some of Ruth’s phrases (p. 39, 4th staff, m.2).

The use of different instruments to accompany different characters is a character-painting device. The predominance of brass for Boaz is also found in Schumann (p. 159). The chant-like sound of some of Ruth’s phrases once again recalls her “oriental” or “Moabite” origins.

Chapter 4  “The Seed of Israel”

The chorus sums up the remainder of the story (4.13). Following this summary, Naomi sings:
Blessed be the Lord which hath not left me this day without a kinsman. For the son of Ruth shall restore my life and shall nourish my old age. My daughter that loved me, that is better to me than seven sons, she hath born him (4.14-15).

The lines Naomi sings here are spoken by the women to Naomi in the Scroll. Ascribing these words to Naomi attributes to her an awareness and appreciation of what Ruth has done for her not evident in the biblical version.

Both Naomi and Ruth have large parts in this final scene. in contrast to their absence in the Scroll's chapter 4. Most of the biblical chapter, including all the legal proceedings, is deleted. The word "kinsman" here replaces the more accurate "redeemer," a crucial term in the legal proceedings but perhaps not understood by the librettist.

Ruth follows Naomi's proclamation with her own, using the same words but changing the pronouns (p.46, m.2):
Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman for the son of Ruth shall restore thy life and shall nourish thy old age. The daughter which loveth thee she hath born him. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

In this version, Naomi and Ruth, rather than the Bethlehemite women, acknowledge what Ruth has done for Naomi. Rather than being silenced at the end, as in the Scroll, both women affirm their roles in the story. In addition, Ruth once again praises God.

After Ruth and Naomi finish, Boaz sings (p. 48):
My son shall be famous in Israel. the son of Ruth shall be the seed of many Kings. The heart of Boaz shall rejoice for the child of my old age shall gladden all the people and of his seed there shall be no end.

Boaz does not speak these words in the Scroll; in fact, after he marries and impregnates Ruth his voice is silenced just like Ruth and Naomi's. Of note here are Boaz's understanding that their son will be the "seed of many kings," his reference to his old age; and his belief that this child will "gladden all the people," which anchors him in the milieu of public responsibility.

This is sung like a proclamation; the vocal line is unaccompanied, but after each phrase the orchestra plays rapid fortissimo chords in the bass. The time signature shifts in every measure, an adaptation to the word-grouping and part of the proclamation style, also lending these measures the quality of a free chant. Though the key is F major, the final phrase modulates first to C# minor and then unexpectedly to C# major, as Boaz sustains an e 'on' on the last word. The closing phrase starts in C# major, for a bright, triumphant sound, accompanied by harp and celeste [also called celesta].

The overall effect of these shifts in pitch is one of triumphant affirmation. This is underlined by the heavily accented chords that come in after each sung phrase as though standing for "amen." The sudden unexpected chromatic shift from C# minor to C# major is also very affirmative.

Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz sing "Rejoice and no more weep" while the chorus sings:
She who left all for the love of Naomi her mother
She who brought joy into the old age of Boaz.

After many choral "Blessed"s, the final chorus joins with Ruth and Naomi:
Let every heart be lifted up to sing the praises of our God and Israel's King.
The volume decreases and the key switches to C minor (p. 54). Ruth reaches a climactic h' for the strongly rhythmic ending (p. 61), with the unusual dynamic marking of ffff (also found in Cowen, Pt. I, p. 129).

The chorus refers at the end to Boaz’s “old age,” which was not mentioned earlier in the libretto. Perhaps it is brought in here to accentuate the miraculous nature of Ruth’s pregnancy. The praises of “Israel’s King” could refer to God but also to David, an example of foreshadowing. Though the closing line is not Psalms or Isaiah, as in some earlier oratorios (Table E, p. 229), the goal is to anchor this work in the tradition of religious oratorios whose primary purpose was to praise God.

Summary

There is no significant change to the text, which is largely from the Scroll. Naomi’s presence has been increased, as she appears in scenes from which she should be absent. There is new text mostly for the chorus, which serves as a “Greek” chorus to comment on actions and emotions not found in the text itself. This offers an insight into characters’ inner feelings never found in the Scroll.

Musically, Mellers utilizes several devices seen in other works: shifting tonalities and rhythms, which here give a fluid feeling to many sections; many wide leaps for the voices; and a few instances of “orientalizing” through modal phrases. Mellers uses different instruments to musically paint characters, such as brass for Boaz and strings for Ruth. [This technique cannot be commented on for most composers, in the absence of an orchestral score or instrumental indications in the piano score].

Adrian Beecham, *Ruth—Cantata*

London, Joseph Williams Ltd., 29 Enford St., Marylebone, W.1
US: Mills Music Inc., NY, 1957
Ruth—soprano; Naomi—alto; Orpah—mezzo; Boaz—baritone
Narrator—soprano; Chorus (mixed)

Adrian Beecham (b. 1904, d. 1982) was the son of the famous conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. His most successful early work was an opera based on *The Merchant of Venice.*

This is one of only two works that uses exclusively text from *Ruth* (the other one is *Aloni*); Beecham even indicates the verses in the score. He includes virtually all of chapters 1 and 2, and selected verses from chapters 3 and 4 (KJV). He wrote this work for the choir at Johns Memorial Church in Farmville, Virginia.

**Chapter 1**

After the narrator sings the opening verses, Naomi’s first aria is to the text of 1:8–9, “Go, return” (p. 12, 3rd staff). There is no home key, but a strong suggestion of C in the Phrygian mode. Naomi starts on C and the aria does not rise more than a fifth above this note until near the end. The orchestra repeatedly plays an open fifth of C and G in a syncopated rhythm, having the effect of an *ostinato* or chant under Naomi’s melody. The chant-like phrases are repeated in the accompaniment as echoes of Naomi’s and also polyphonically, while she sings (p. 13 and on). This general pattern is not altered until it is repeated on a higher pitch (p. 13, reh. 69), with the open fifth chords in the accompaniment briefly changing to G–D, and then changing the pattern.

The weaving together of the voice and orchestra grows more complex beginning with “The Lord grant you” (1:9; p. 13, reh. 69), with more chromaticism and strange, unexpected intervals. The longest phrase, with *melismas* giving it the quality of a wail, is on the last
word, “husband” (p. 14, m.3), taking the voice up to e’ before ending on c’#, an octave higher than the opening note. Then the ostinato fifths in the accompaniment return.

There is little obvious emotion expressed in this modal and chant-like music. Naomi ending on a higher note than the starting one could indicate optimism and hope. But the opening part is repeated at the end (standard musical convention of ABA form), concluding on a dissonant chord which could indicate hopelessness.

Orpah starts the duet “Surely we will return with thee” (1.10; p. 16, 2nd staff), followed after two measures by Ruth. The time signature is an unusual 5/2, creating phrases so long as to give the impression there are no bar lines. In fact, a few measures later the bar lines are virtually erased (p. 16, 3rd staff). As in the earlier solo, there is no audible home key, but the impression of A-flat in the Mixolydian mode. Orpah starts on a’ flat over an A-flat major chord, and Ruth starts a fifth higher accompanied by the same chord. Ruth echoes each of Orpah’s phrases in a higher range, while Orpah continues under Ruth’s voice, leading to an ambivalence about which woman is “in charge.”

The duet grows louder and higher, reaching a” flat on “people” (p. 17, m.4). There is sparse accompaniment throughout, only syncopated chords. Near the end, two phrases are sung unaccompanied, possibly to make the dissonance between the voices more obvious: on “thee.” Ruth sings f” against Orpah’s g’ flat, joined then by an a flat in the bass accompaniment (p. 17, 2nd staff, m.3). In the second unaccompanied phrase, on “people,” Ruth holds a d” flat against Orpah’s e” (3rd staff, m.1). Both of these dissonant moments involve sustained notes. Their final harmony is b’ flat and e” flat, an open fourth. The tone of the duet, like the rest of the cantata, is that of a chant.

The music of Orpah and Ruth could be interpreted as a comment on their relationship, since the ambivalence of who is really in charge is reflected musically. The two seem to affirm each other. The fact that their voices seldom sing together homophonically, and in fact are often in sharp dissonance or in open fourths, could musically indicate a kind of separation and could be highlighting their individuality.

Naomi’s next aria is “Turn again, my daughters” (1.11-13):

This aria is in a faster tempo than the previous section. The key is an ambiguous D-flat major and b flat minor, later with a suggestion of A-flat Mixolydian (p.19, top). Like the earlier aria, it stays in a low range and is marked by chant-like figures against mostly syncopated chords in the accompaniment, or rapid ascending arpeggios and runs.
As in the previous aria, the second part (p.19, reh. #12) repeats the same melodic figures in a higher range. The last section, “Would ye tarry” (1.13: p. 20, reh. #13) has a much fuller accompaniment, with the higher instruments echoing Naomi’s tunes and the bass playing four groups of 16th note figures. There are three octave leaps here: first on “would ye tarry” (reh. #13), from a flat-a’ flat; then on “would ye stay” (p.21, m.3), d’ flat-d” flat; finally on “the Lord is gone out” (p.22, m.2-3). e’ flat-e” flat. She sings her final words, “against me” (p. 22, 2nd staff), on melismatic figures that continue for three full measures. At the end of this passage, Naomi sings an unaccompanied f”, leading to a momentary resolution in the next measure’s D flat major. But the final ending of the aria is a dissonant chord, containing within it both b flat minor and D flat major (p. 22, 4th staff, m.2).

There is great subtlety in the representation of emotional states. The raises in pitch in Naomi’s octave leaps indicate an intensification of emotion. The prolonged melismatic figures of her final phrase sound like a moan. The very temporary resolution dissolving into dissonance is a musical portrayal of dashed hopes.

The next aria is Ruth’s “Entreat me not” (1.16-17):

The solo line is much more sustained and melodious, and less chant-like than Naomi’s music. The third part of the aria, to the text “Thy people” (p. 26, last measure) starts a fourth higher (on g’) than the opening part, but does not remain in this high tessitura. The last line, “The Lord do so to me” (p. 28, m.2) also starts on g’ but remains in this range, and is the most dramatic part of the aria. This part is all sung above e’”, reaching a’” on “also” (2nd staff, m.2). There are echoes of Naomi’s earlier chant-like melismas, but transformed by both the higher range and the dramatic and heavy chords under the vocal line. These contrast greatly to the sparse accompaniment of Naomi’s earlier aria. The words “part thee” (p. 28, 3rd staff, m.2-3) are accompanied by an unexpected C major chord, the 4th degree of G Doric, under Ruth’s g’”. The voice then drops a seventh to a’, sung unaccompanied. The orchestra follows with a few measures of unresolved phrases, before murmuring to a close on a soft tremolo fifth chord of G-D, with a suspended C.

Again, the messages about character’s emotional states are suggested in subtle ways: the steadily higher pitches suggest increasing excitement, along with the louder and heavier accompaniment. As in the last aria, there is a sense of promised resolution at the conclusion that is almost immediately shattered by dissonance. There is still suspense at this stage of the story and this is reflected in the music.

The next aria is “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21):
The first three measures are in C major. The opening measure is sung unaccompanied; when the orchestra does play, it is only sparse chords, playing on the off-beats. On the word “mara” (“bitter”), the accompaniment is in d minor, against Naomi’s e’. On the last syllable of the word, the b’ becomes b’ flat. The highest note of the aria is on the word “full,” e’ sustained for five beats over open fifths that become an E major arpeggio in the orchestra (p. 32, reh. #21). “Why then call ye me Naomi” is sung unaccompanied, and the phrases that follow lead up to another e” on “Lord” (p. 33, top). But in contrast to the e’’ on “full,” there is no tonic E major but only ambiguous harmonies. The voice continues to descend from this point. The aria ends accompanied by an arpeggio of open fifths between E and B (p. 33, 3rd staff, m.3). So the aria that had started with a simple C major tune ends in E Phrygian, known as the “lament” mode, and also ends on Naomi’s lowest note, e’.

The flattening of the B on the end of “Mara” is a musical representation of the shift from the name “Naomi” to “Mara.” The climactic moment of the aria comes on the word “full,” which lands on a tonic E major to musically paint Naomi’s memories of a happier time. But by the end, there is no tonic but rather a lamenting mode, a bitter, empty sound. It is a short journey from consonance to dissonance, musically painting Naomi’s mood darkening as she relates her story.

Chapter 2

There is a slight alteration, with the deletion of the narrator’s words from 2.7 and 2.10. Ruth sings the text “I pray you let me glean” (2.7) herself, in a short “Pastorale” (p. 45). This 9-measure song, with its steady rhythm and less complex harmonies, has a folk-tune quality but with dissonant intrusions (B flat against a sung a’ in m.3; d minor chord under sustained g’ in m.8). C major is heard in 1 1/2 measures, on the word “reapers” (m.6-7).

The lack of modality and chant imitation found throughout the work may be an attempt to portray a simpler Ruth than was seen in her music of the previous chapter; or a Ruth trying to appear simple to appeal to Boaz’s chivalry. On the other hand, this song may just be an attempt to create a pastoral mood.

Boaz’s aria “Hearest thou not” (2.8; p. 45, reh. #8) starts in c minor and 4/4 time, but has a chanting quality and no sense of a home key. The accompaniment echoes most of Boaz’s phrases in different keys.

Ruth’s next words, “Why have I found grace” (2.10; reh. #10) are sung to a simple 9-measure melody. She enters on b’ flat, the tonality in which Boaz just ended. The tune is initially sung unaccompanied, then shifts into E-flat major, relative to Boaz’s ending B-flat
major, to a simple accompaniment. The bottom note of the accompaniment is in the first inversion, so there is still not a strong sense of a home key. There is a brief sound of B flat major before the ending on an open fifth chord, B flat and F (p. 48, top).

The accompaniment to Boaz’s words to Ruth, “Hearest thou not,” includes repetition of Boaz’s phrases, which musically underlines them while also suggesting pomposity. Ruth entering on a note that is part of the closing chord of Boaz’s aria musically shows a kind of connection with Boaz, or possibly subservience.

Boaz sings a slightly longer aria. “It has been fully showed me” (2.11). Ruth’s response (2.13: p. 50, reh. #13) sounds entirely different from her previous “Pastorale.” In this short section, she sings more of the “chant” style heard in Naomi’s and Boaz’s music, and in her own when she was with Naomi. The difference is that here she sings in her highest range, reaching a $h'$ flat (p. 51, m.4). She sings the same kind of melismas as earlier, but all in a much higher tessitura. The section ends on an open fifth chord, B flat-F, as heard earlier.

Assuming the “chant” style is a truer musical portrait of each character, then in this scene Ruth seems willing to show more of her true self. In any case, in this section her music is more complex and in a higher range, showing more feeling.

Chapter 3 After Naomi’s instructions to Ruth (3.1-4: p. 57, reh. #2), Ruth’s response is omitted (3.5). The dialogue between Ruth and Boaz beginning with “Who art thou?” (3.9: p. 59) is followed by Boaz’s aria (3.10-13: p. 59). The rest of the chapter (3.14-18) is omitted, including the Ruth-Naomi scene.

Chapter 4 Boaz’s music in this scene (p. 65) has orientalist features, such as chromatic complementarity, and resembles chant more than any other part of the cantata. The chorus sings “We are witnesses” (4.11-12) in unison, followed by a two-part fugato with the sopranos and tenors against the altos and basses (pp. 66-67). After these verses, there is an orchestral interlude played allegro con brio (pp. 69-70). The final line of these verses, “be famous in Bethlehem” (4.12), concludes the oratorio. As the chorus sustains the final C major chord, the orchestra plays an ascending C major scale together with an Aeolian scale a third above it (p. 71). This is a very upbeat conclusion in an almost-conventional key, but with the addition of a modal scale consistent with the rest of the work.

Summary

There are no significant alterations from the Scroll text; omissions made do not seem to have any purpose other than simplification. The device of alternating between a narrator, soloists, and chorus effectively presents different points of view. When the chorus serves as narrator, it usually sings in unison, effectively imitating the sound of a single voice.

This is very subdued music. Emotional undercurrents are almost as hard to tease out as they are in the original Scroll. Subtle techniques like gradually ascending pitch or volume in the voice, sometimes over a large continuous section, are usually the only indication of increased excitement. Beecham depicts the shift from “Naomi” to “Mara” in Naomi’s aria “Call me not” with an unexpected flattening of the note sung at the end of “Mara” (p. 187). The use of “oriental” modes colors the work with a tinge of exoticism, and this seems to have been Beecham’s primary interest. Many sections end on open fifths rather than on more traditional tonic chords. A combination of adjacent perfect fifths in 20th century harmony generally denotes stability.

Lennox Berkeley, Ruth, Opera in Three Scenes, opus 50
Libretto by Eric Crozier
J. & W. Chester Ltd., 1956
Ruth—mezzo; Naomi—soprano; Orpah—soprano; Boaz—tenor; Chorus

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Lennox Berkeley (b. 1903, d. 1989), like his colleague Benjamin Britten, wrote a specific work with tenor Peter Pears in mind: the part of Boaz in *Ruth* was sung by Pears in the 1956 premiere. *Ruth* was performed again in 1983 (concert performance, not staged), at the Cheltenham Festival, when Berkeley was 80. More recently, as part of the Berkeley centenary celebrations, it was again performed at the Cheltenham Festival on July 20, 2003. This was billed as a “semi-staging,” but in reality the opera has not been fully staged since the 1950’s, when it was performed several times (Peter Reynolds, personal communication, 12/9/2003).

The small chamber orchestra in this work consists of two flutes, horn, piano, percussion and strings. My references to orchestration are based on an audio tape.

There is a complete break with older tradition of voice types: Naomi here is a soprano, Ruth a mezzo, Boaz a tenor; in keeping with the opera genre, there is no narrator. In the libretto by Crozier (who was one of Britten’s librettists as well), modern text is interspersed with the biblical text (modified KJV).

**Chapter 1 Scene 1**

The opening trio begins with Naomi singing a theme that was heard in the orchestral introduction and becomes a leitmotif in the opera. This is to be sung “with fervor”:

> "Once more I see your green and golden hills, o Judah! (all repeat o Judah); Once again I stand, my journey done, within your promised land (Ruth and Orpah repeat o Judah).

> O Bethlehem, my dear beloved home where the traveler finds rest.

There is no equivalent to this text in *Naomi*’s words in the Scroll. The only mention of Bethlehem and Judah there is in the narration (1.1-2). Naomi here is a flesh-and-blood woman with feelings of nostalgia, and relief at returning to her home. There is also a foregrounding of “Judah” over Bethlehem, which represents an important place and group identity (also found in Schumann, p. 160).

Ruth and then Orpah echo the last words of Naomi’s phrases. Naomi is definitely the strongest voice in this trio; she sings a melody line with only a high tremolo in the orchestra to accompany her, while the other two intone “o Judah” as a kind of wail, accompanied by heavy and dissonant chords. As the trio continues with “O Bethlehem” (p. 3, reh. 4), the three voices start together before going their own ways; they continue to all sing the same words, increasingly louder. The last few measures are sung a cappella by all three voices (p. 6, top), ending finally on an open pianissimo fifth chord, B-F (reh. 7). Naomi continues (p. 6, measure after reh. 7):

> But, oh, who will remember me? What friend will greet me? Who will laugh to see this broken hearted exile Naomi?

This text expresses Naomi’s sadness and tears while at the same time capturing some of the self-pity found in 1.11-13. It is very explicit gap-filling for both emotions and evaluation of those emotions.

She sings “Naomi” twice, like a wail (p. 6, last measure to p. 7, top), echoed by Ruth and then Orpah to a different and slower musical figure. “Turn back my daughters” (1.8) is sung as recitative (p. 7, 2nd staff, m.2), opening with an ascending fifth sung forte; only

In a 1968 BBC Radio 3 broadcast, each of the three “Scenes” opened with a spoken narration over orchestral background. This was a device used by the BBC for opera broadcasts at that time to “set the scene” for the listeners at home, without breaking the music’s continuity (Peter Reynolds, personal communication, 10/11/03).
sustained chords in the piano accompany this recitative. Ruth and Orpah protest (1.10; p. 8, top). Naomi repeats the line “Turn back, my daughters” (1.11) to the same ascending fifth, but starting a fourth higher and with a more frenzied and dramatic accompaniment under her g” (p. 9, measure after reh. =9).

The open fifth chord that closes the first part of this trio might musically represent (momentary) rest. The repetition of the name “Naomi” like a wail, ending with Ruth’s unaccompanied voice, is an effective musical representation of the biblical “they raised their voices and wept.” The pathos of the music comes closer to a weeping sound in this scene than any other score examined. Naomi’s repetition of her command in a louder and higher voice expresses the increased vehemence of her words.

Naomi now sings a prayer to God (p. 9, reh. =10):

Almighty Father, let my cry come unto thee! Be merciful in thy reply. O comfort me!
Against me hast thou set thy face, in indignation, depriving me of thy sweet grace and consolation. My husband thou hast doomed to die, my sons hast taken. In widowhood and begging I am forsaken...
O God of Judah, let my prayer to pity move thee.

When Naomi blames God for her misfortunes in the Scroll, she never addresses God in the second person as she does here. As bitter and hopeless as she sounds even in this text, there is an intimation of a relationship with a personal God that is not evident in the biblical passage.

The opening words are sung on two sets of repeated d’s, almost like a recitation, under high, repeated 16th note figures in the strings. After “Against me” the vocal line ascends and descends the scale, no longer a chant (p. 10, 2nd staff). Near the end, there is a reprise of the earlier recitation style on “O God of Judah.”

High strings are often used for an “ethereal” effect (Cooke 1959, 111: he offers Violetta’s death in Verdi’s La Traviata as the perfect example). A “religious” tone is achieved by the imitation of liturgical chant that opens and closes the aria.

Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go back:

Orpah thou art very young. Return to thy mother who awaits thee (p. 14, last measure-p. 15, top).

The Scroll never hints at the age of any of the three women. This single line of text fills the gap of Orpah’s motivation: she is imagined here as much younger than Ruth and therefore not mature enough to leave her mother. It has always been assumed that both Ruth and Orpah were married for ten years; the Scroll actually only says Elimelech’s family stayed in Moab ten years. The precise year when the sons married is never stated.

Instead of departing at once (1.14), Orpah sings a long aria, ending on a sustained h”. The range and quality of this vocal music suggest a very young woman. This is a complete innovation (Orpah does not have a solo aria in any other work discussed), and gives Orpah a reality she does not have elsewhere. It makes her departure into a dramatic moment, although the aria portrays sweetness rather than passion.

After the aria, Orpah departs, as indicated in Naomi’s singing “Behold thy sister” (1.15; p. 19, reh. =29). These words are sung to the leitmotif that opened the opera, which referred to Judah. Naomi ends on a d” which then shifts enharmonically to e’ flat on which Ruth enters and responds (p. 19, 2nd staff):

Nay, entreat me not to leave thee! Forbid me not to follow after thee!

These decalcalatorj words are sung as a recitative, immediately followed by the aria “Whither thou goest” (1.16-17 KJV):
This melody has a steady pulse of 3/4 time and a suggestion of both F major and F minor; the home key is rarely evident. On “where thou diest” (p. 20, reh. #22), the orchestra plays a chord of G-C against the sung F; the F functions as a suspension to E, the third of a C major chord, and the orchestra follows this. Such suspensions are found throughout the aria. The vocal line is characterized by chromatic complementarity, varying from whole to half step intervals.

The main theme is repeated three times on increasingly higher notes. The voice dips to its lowest note, c’, on the word “buried” (p. 20, measure before reh. #23). “Nothing but death” is repeated to the same melodic pattern but off the beat and in a dotted rhythm. The closing phrase “And thy God” (p. 21, m.2 after reh. #24) reprises the opening notes of the aria, with a small change in the final 16th-note phrase: the interval of a major second is flattened to a minor second.

The aria ends on a sustained b’’ flat over a C7 chord (p. 21, 2nd staff). But when the voice stops, only a sustained middle C is heard in the orchestra, the closest to a resolution this music reaches; there is no C major in the orchestra independent from the voice.

There are subtle suggestions of Ruth’s emotional state, mostly in the small pitch and rhythm changes. The repetition of a theme in increasingly higher pitches musically depicts increased excitement or agitation. The rhythmic alteration in the words referring to death also illustrate greater agitation, and there is musical word-painting with the word “buried” on the lowest note in the aria.

At the end of the aria, Ruth has not found resolution. The tonality almost becomes C major, which is often associated with purity and has been used by Berkeley to that purpose (Dickinson, 179); but the presence of a B flat keeps the chord a C7. The flattening of Ruth’s a’ in the last little 16th-note run is a subtle musical signal of doubt or memory of past grief, both also reflected in the lack of tonal resolution.

After Ruth’s aria, Ruth and Naomi sing a short unaccompanied passage in which they agree to go on together to Bethlehem. The a capella setting effectively mimics speech (p. 21, reh. #25):

*Come, daughter, (come, mother), come my well-beloved, Let us go on together, let us go hence to Bethlehem.*

The major change from the Scroll here is the aspect of mutual consent.

On Naomi’s entrance into Bethlehem, the chorus sings (p. 22, 4th staff):

*Is this that Naomi who was called beautiful?*

*Only the first half of this question is in the original (1,19); the people never refer to Naomi who was beautiful, but this idea is found in rabbinic midrash (ch. 3, p. 63).*
This is sung contrapuntally with irregular placement of rhythmic patterns within the bar—for example, there is conflict between 3/4 and 6/8 meters (p. 26, top).

The effect produced by the meter conflict is one of great agitation and excitement. The tone of the chorus is one of mockery.

They stop abruptly; there is a suspended note in the horn (p. 26, 3rd staff, m.2), after which the tempo changes to lento and a solo cello plays a two-measure solo (p. 27, top). Then Naomi enters and sings an *a capella* recitative (p. 27, 1st-2nd staves):

No! Call me not Naomi! Call me Mara, for the Almighty hath humbled me, and filled my soul with bitterness.

This is a paraphrase of 1.20; a significant addition is “humbled me,” highlighting an aspect of Naomi’s personality, namely humility, present in this opera but not in the Scroll.

The word “Mara” is sung on an ascending fourth, *a flat-d’ flat* (p. 27, 2nd staff). It is jarring because her earlier words seemed to be in G major. The word “bitterness” is sung to a chromatic phrase with dotted rhythm and small intervals such as diminished thirds and minor seconds.

The solo cello, with its mellow and poignant sound, was chosen to establish a mood for Naomi’s entrance. The final word “bitterness” sounds almost like a moan because of the small intervals and dotted rhythm, a reference to traditional funeral music.

After this recitative, a new *allegro* section in the orchestra leads directly to Naomi’s aria:

![Figure 32: Berkeley, “Call me not Naomi.” p. 28, reh. #32](image)

Ah, call me not Naomi, let Mara be my name (this line is sung several times). A woman full of misery, a widow filled with shame. Nay, why will ye mock at me! I beg ye to forget a name that calls to memory past sorrow, past regret.

*Naomi never refers to herself as a widow or as feeling shame, in the Scroll. This opera’s portrayal is of a downtrodden, shamed, and humbled Naomi. The idea of the Bethlehemites mocking her is developed further in the next scene (see below).*

This aria is in quick 3/4 time without an evident home key; for example, while Naomi starts on *d’*”, there is an *ostinato* C in the bass. The word “Mara” is sung to a descending fourth, *d’’ flat* to *a’ flat*, the exact reversal of the pitches sung unaccompanied as an ascending fourth on “Mara” in the recitative just heard (p. 27, 2nd staff). The *d’’ flat* here, however, is yet more dissonant against the C in the orchestra. This C against D-flat is heard again (p. 29, 2 measures before reh. #34; p. 31, where the interval is sustained throughout the 3rd-4th staves).
The pitch ascends to "shame" and then g" on "Ah" (p. 29, 2nd-3rd staves), where the accompaniment changes into sharply dissonant chords marking the three beats of this bar. The second repetition of the opening phrase is found at the end (p. 31, 2nd staff), except the final word "name" this time goes up to e" flat. The closing chord heard in the upper parts of the orchestra is an A-flat major triad in the second inversion, but the bass includes a dissonant D-flat along with C, the first inversion of the A-flat chord.

Subtle changes in pitch and volume in this aria offer clues to Naomi's feelings. The theme itself is a series of descending notes, which always stands for sadness or even despair. Dissonance is prevalent throughout this score, but in this aria one particular dissonance—C against D-flat—comes to represent Naomi's bitterness in particular. The two notes are first heard together on the word "Mara" and then continue to intrude, as a reminder of the meaning behind that name. Even when there is a tonic chord at the end that includes Naomi's note, this dissonance is not resolved. In Berkeley's musical language, there is no true resolution at this point in the story.

The scene closes with a women's chorus softly singing "Where is Naomi?" while Naomi sings "Is there no end to my sorrows, O God" up to a" (pp. 34-35).

Chapter 2
Scene 2

When the crowd sees Ruth, they turn against her, calling her an enemy and a Moabitite, shouting:

A stranger, a stranger. Drive her away, cast her out, stone her!

The words are hammered out, with a strong bass repetition of unison octaves and dissonant chords in the treble, and angry, syncopated rhythms. The music, punctuated by heavy drumbeats, vividly portrays an angry mob. Ruth pleads with them in a sustained line above their notes (pp. 64-68).

Boaz enters and says to the crowd:
Is this how ye repay the blessings God has given ye? Shame upon you! Are ye like wolves to greet a stranger in this fashion! Have ye no mercy in your souls? Has Judah no compassion?

They respond:
She is a witch, a Moabitite, stone her! Have we not widows of our own? Why should we pity her? She has no claim upon our charity. She is a witch! (this last line is shouted, not sung)

The Head Reaper says:
They fear her. Master, because she is a woman of another race (p. 73).

The biblical injunction against Moabites (Lev. 23:4) could be considered the source of this xenophobia, but it is presented here in a modern guise.

Boaz wants to punish the crowd, but Ruth pleads for them in a recitative (pp. 80-81):
They are like children, they fear what they don't know, hate what they cannot understand. Be merciful to them.

Then she continues (p. 81, reh. #29):
Ah, let not anger fill your eyes! Have mercy, do not punish those who fear their ancient foes. Be merciful, I beg, be wise.

Modern ideas like those expressed by Ruth are mingled in this scene with reference to biblical ideas like charity and forgiveness, possibly influenced by Berkeley's devout
Catholicism is known to have worked very closely with Crazier on the libretto. There is probably also a socio-political foundation to these words, written so soon after WWII.

Ruth's words are sung softly to a simple melody in 3/4 time, accompanied by strings playing soft chords. The pleading tune is repeated several times, each time at a higher starting pitch. Boaz then enters singing the same melody:

How fair this maiden and how wise in understanding, she pleads for those who prove themselves her foes.

Ruth is never described in the Scroll either as fair or wise; qualities such as kindness and loyalty are ascribed to her here based on her actions towards Naomi, and the midrashists ascribed modesty to her based on her behavior in the field (chap. 3, pp. 64-66). But Boaz perceives a different Ruth because this entire scene places Ruth in a position to show qualities she had no chance to show in the original narrative.

After Boaz recapitulates the tune just sung by Ruth, the two voices weave in and out of each other contrapuntally and also blending (p. 82, 2nd staff). The tenor range is taken advantage of in this short section, reaching a' flat (3rd staff, m.2). It is unusual to have Ruth and Boaz singing simultaneously in a true duet.

The fact that Ruth and Boaz sing together but to different tunes and words is a musical way of showing that both are lost in their own thoughts. The coming together of their voices indicates a closeness between them right from their first meeting. Yet at the same time, Boaz is singing about Ruth in the third person, while Ruth is singing directly to Boaz, so at this point the relationship is depicted as one-sided.

After another lengthy Ruth-Boaz duet (pp. 85-93), the scene closes with Boaz and the chorus of reapers singing together:

In Ruth and in her seed, shall Israel be blessed indeed.

This text seems out of place, and certainly seems to be jumping the gun in terms of plot development. Perhaps it is a way of reassuring the listener that the next scene will turn out well.

Chapter 3 Scene 3

In a departure from the Scroll, Naomi actually takes Ruth to the threshing floor. Ruth sings:

I am afraid lest any man should see me in these fine garments.

This fear is never expressed in the Scroll, where the reader is left to wonder how Ruth felt about following Naomi's commands.

Naomi reassures Ruth (p. 106, 2nd staff):

Fear not, beloved Ruth! Thou shalt find rest within the heart of one who loves thee well. The sorrows of thy widowhood shall cease: thou shalt find happiness and peace within the house of Israel. Thy womb shall bring forth children to redeem my husband and my two dear sons from shame. Thou, my daughter shall preserve them from the darkness of oblivion. In thee the dead shall live again.

The only verse resembling a Scroll verse is "thou shalt find rest" (variant on 3.1). Otherwise there are several new ideas. Naomi refers to the sorrows of Ruth's widowhood. Ruth's function- to bear Boaz's children- is clearly stated. The notion that shame and oblivion would result if she failed to do this is new, although the danger of family "oblivion" is implicit in the biblical concept of "redeeming." But the explicitness of the threat here makes the imperative to marry Boaz all the stronger.
The aria (reh. #6) begins calmly, with a gentle lullaby-like melody. The tone changes on “house of Israel” (p. 107, stt. st. in 2), where loud chords accompany the voice, which rises to a ′ before descending. On the words “Thy womb” (reh. #7), the aria resumes the tone of the opening section. The orchestra concludes with the melody heard to the words “Thy womb shall bring forth” (reh. #7).

The calm tone of this aria is meant to portray Naomi reassuring Ruth of her future. The sudden rise in pitch and volume significantly depicts Naomi’s excitement at the prospect of Ruth’s entry into the house of Israel. The melody referring to Ruth’s womb is appropriately reprised in the orchestra on the reference to the dead living again in Ruth.

Following Naomi’s aria, a group of laborers approaches the threshing floor and Ruth and Naomi hide. Several harvest songs follow, including references to drinking and dancing. Boaz and the reapers sing hymns of praise to God.

This lengthily and complex choral interlude is radically different in mood from the rest of the opera. The rhythms are highly syncopated and there is a folk element in the tunes. It sets a mood of joyfulness and even drunkenness, contrasting greatly with the remainder of the scene (pp. 113-162).

After this choral interlude, Ruth sings a short prayer (p. 164, top):

To thee, beloved God, I do commend my spirit. In thee I trust; be thou mine aid. With thee beside to comfort me, I shall not falter. Thou art near. I shall not be afraid.

The opening verse is taken from the NT, specifically Luke 23.46, Jesus’ last words. There is also a similar sentiment expressed to that of Psalm 23.4: This solo certainly portrays a Ruth with far more religious sentiment than in the Scroll.

The opening melody seems to mimic Naomi’s previous aria (p. 106), but the fourth note becomes a half step interval instead of a major third. There is an octave leap on “in thee” from F-′/F-′ but otherwise the beginning is calm. The accompaniment seems to tell another story: each of the four beats in the measure is marked heavily in the bass. Later in the aria there are constantly fluctuating time signatures (from 2 4 to 3 4 to 4 4, back to 2 4, back to 3 4, all in the space of five measures: p. 165). Hutes play ornate melismas, derived from a scutter pattern, over the voice, almost a descent with echoes of Bach. The closing measures in the orchestra calm down, playing a slow series of descending chromatic tones. An echo of the “Whither thou goest” leitmotif is heard in the orchestra (p. 165, 4th stt).

Ruth’s opening tune starts identically to Naomi’s melody in which she sang reassuring words (“Fear not”) but shifts to a chromatic interval instead of the expected major third. This is a subtle indicator of uncertainty or fear. The heavy beats at the opening of this aria seem to be sounding out Ruth’s heavy heartbeat. (Dickinson says of this passage, “Her heart is pounding.” 183). The flute sound is often associated with purity, and that is probably true in a passage like this. The musical flashback to Ruth’s “Whither thou goest” of the first scene shows how far Ruth will go to fulfill her pledge.

Naomi then encourages Ruth to approach Boaz, which she does as she sings (based on 3.9):

In the name of my dead husband, thy kinsman, Naomi’s son. I beseech thee o my Master. Spread thy cloak upon me.

Boaz asks:

Wherefore shall I do this thing?
She responds:
That I may be thy wife. Yea, verily, that I may bring up sons unto Naomi, lest her name perish from the land and be forgotten (p. 168, top).

This is changed from the original, where Ruth simply informed Boaz that he was a kinsman. Here she is much more direct in stating what she wants. In another deviation from the Scroll, where she never mentions Naomi’s name, she refers to Naomi twice. This text spells out the idea that Ruth’s purpose is to bring up sons for Naomi, which Naomi had stated earlier. This idea is never stated outright in the Scroll, where it is a result but not a stated aim. While Ruth sings this passage, the orchestra plays the leitmotif of Ruth’s “Whither thou goest,” a way of pointing to Ruth’s dedication to Naomi as her primary motive in approaching Boaz.

A sudden, loud dissonant chord introduces Boaz’s dramatic response; entering on a forte g♯’ (p. 168, 3rd staff, m.2):
Ah, Ruth! Thou comest in the stillness of the night, as once the angels came immeasurably bright to Jacob, father of our race. Lo here I see the clear enchanting vision of eternity that Jacob saw!

Boaz is given a more Jewish and patriarchal stamp by his reference to Jacob, and Ruth is elevated by his comparing of her to the angels seen by Jacob (Gen. 28.12). Ruth is also called lovely, innocent, graceful, and young, qualities not assigned to her in the Scroll.

The rhythm is a placid 4/4 and the calm accompaniment is played by piano. Boaz repeats the name “Ruth” twice, both times on descending fifths but the second time starting a sixth lower (p. 168, last measure, p. 169, m.2) and sung mf in contrast to the opening forte. The aria is a kind of passacaglia based on a twelve-note row, though the row is not treated consistently (Dickinson, 185).

Using the piano alone here adds an intimacy that the usual orchestral accompaniment would lack. Repeating “Ruth” twice is an effective way of portraying Boaz’s excitement as well as tenderness, in the way the name is repeated more softly the second time. The passacaglia at the end creates a change of atmosphere building up to resolution of the plot.

After further dialogue, and an aria for Ruth, a soft orchestral introduction leads to the love duet, marked espressivo (Fig. 42). This section opens as Boaz spreads his cloak over Ruth. Then they sing together:

Figure 33: Berkeley. “Lo my beloved,” p. 176, 2nd staff, m.3

Lo, my beloved, my soul’s delight, to thee I give my hand. Thine shall I be eternally. My children shall arise up and call thee blessed. The fruit of thy womb shall praise thee in the gates.
The third and fourth of these verses paraphrase Prov. 31:28, verses that praise a good wife. As in other works that also quote this proverb (Schumann, p. 162), or verses from Song of Songs, the “biblicized” text places the story in a different realm than an ordinary love story.

The opening differs significantly from most of the score, as it features triads of thirds. It opens with several measures of single sustained chords in the flute section, an ethereal sound, modulating to reach a c minor chord, the home key for this section. The tonality is not sustained, but it is an interesting attempt to ground these very traditional-sounding lyrics in more traditional-sounding tonality, even if only for a few measures. The first section is a kind of round, or passacaglia, as Ruth repeats exactly what Boaz has just sung while he continues. There is a nice musical touch on “arise,” which is sung on an ascending scale (p. 178, 2nd staff, m.2). Ruth and Boaz continue to sing separately and then come together in harmony, though not on the same lyrics until the final phrase, “shall praise thee,” which is sung in unison to a dotted rhythm with high tremolo accompaniment (p. 179, 3rd staff, m.2). They end on a unison G over a C major chord and rapid scale (p. 180).

This is a musical depiction of two people uniting, but its tone is gentle rather than passionate. Significantly, only when they are praising God do they sing the same words at the same moment.

Chapter 4

There is really no chapter 4, which means the conflict found in the Scroll is eliminated; instead it is a continuation of the opera’s Scene 3. In an interesting plot change, Boaz immediately calls his people from sleep, in words set to a very excited rhythm, and Naomi steps forward to embrace Ruth. A trio between the three follows. Then Boaz proclaims to the crowd:

Behold this maid. For love of Naomi she left her father’s home, forsook her gods, departed from the land where she did dwell. Hither she came, like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the land of Israel.

The legal issues about the proper redeemer are completely eliminated, simplifying the story. Some of the text sung by Boaz is spoken by the people in the Scroll (4:11), while some recalls the narrative of chapter 1, as if the people need reminding of Ruth’s whole story. This makes sense in light of their previous hostility to her. Presumably Boaz needs to tell the crowd Ruth’s story now to avoid any future hostility. The reference to “her father’s home” replaces Naomi’s reference to the “mother’s house” (1:8). It makes sense that a man like Boaz as portrayed here would refer to the father and not the mother. It implies that the crowd he is addressing would also be more understanding of the “father’s home” reference.

In a melodious, bright passage, Boaz announces to everyone that he will marry Ruth (p. 197, top). The theme is picked up by flutes, echoed by a women’s chorus, then the full chorus. The people all agree to be witnesses, singing:

Rejoice O Israel, thy womb shall bring forth kings.

In this phrase, the people’s blessing is extended from Ruth to all Israel. This is significant because it shows that the people have moved from rejecting Ruth to fully accepting her, as evidenced in the equation of her womb with that of all Israel.

1 This musical form was very popular in English 17th-century music (e.g. Purcell), and this might be a 20th-century reference to an emerging performance practice of pre-classical music (Rokus de Groot, personal communication). Dickinson mentions that the duet is “introduced over a Purcellian ground bass in c minor” (Dickinson, 1851).
The final chorus (pp. 200-223) praises God:

Sing His praise, praise His name!

This is a polyphonic piece of great excitement, sung quickly to staccato 16th note accompaniment and concluding in B major on a triumphant B♭.

There are major changes here, basically because all the judicial proceedings, and the birth and naming of Obed, are deleted in favor of a generalized conclusion and praise of God. This tendency to summarize chapter 4 has been seen elsewhere (Table A, p. 206), but this work is exceptional in its lack of mention of even the names Obed, David, or the Messiah. The focus is more on the resolution of the conflict between rejection and acceptance, indicating that God had a role in the people's final acceptance of Ruth.

Summary
This libretto is an interesting blend of biblical and non-biblical texts. Though the librettist creates a love interest between Boaz and Ruth, there is also emphasis on the importance of the Ruth-Naomi relationship. Ruth's pledge is continually brought back, in musical terms, as the motivating force behind all her actions.

Musically, at this point in the 20th century it is pointless to refer to dissonant moments, because there are so few moments that are not dissonant. But within this harmonic structure, Berkeley creates various degrees of dissonance to highlight emotional moments. For example, a minor second or ninth is more dissonant than a major second or ninth. The minor ninth is used as the theme of Naomi's bitterness (p. 193). Chromaticism is also predominant in this score, but because it is found in soft and understated passages, it seems to represent the supernatural world rather than passion, as was true earlier in the century where it was used in more dramatic musical moments. The work as a whole has an ethereal, almost otherworldly sound. Many of the messages about characters' feelings are found "between the lines." In the orchestra part rather than the vocal. For this reason, a first hearing of this work might not reveal all its riches, but deeper study brings out the more interesting connections.

Aminadav Aloni, Ruth, A Biblical Opera
Text from the Bible; 1986: Hebrew and his own English translation
Ruth mezzo: Naomi soprano: Boaz--baritone (no Orpah)
Chorus (male and female)

Aminadav Aloni (b. Tel Aviv 1928, d. Los Angeles 1999) moved to the U.S. in 1945, where he studied musical theory, composition and conducting at Los Angeles City College and Juilliard in New York.

Aloni's setting of Ruth was commissioned in Sherman Oaks, California in 1986 and performed twice, in 1989 and 2002. Aloni set the text of each chapter to a different chanting tradition (troped, or בּלעא; ch. 3 Excursus, p. 82): Babylonian-Sephardic for Chapter 1, Italian Persian for Chapter 2, Syrian Palestinian for Chapter 3, and Eastern European Ashkenazic for Chapter 4 (Cantor Aviva Rosenbloom, personal communication, 22.01.03). Aloni used only the biblical text, some parts in the original Hebrew, others in idiomatic English (his own translations). Aloni wanted to retain the Hebrew while also making his work accessible. There is an intricate dialogue throughout between the soloists (singing in English), the men's chorus (singing in English) and the women's chorus (singing mostly in Hebrew and mostly cantillation). Some of the Hebrew sections are translated into English and spoken. [As a general rule, no work called an opera would have any narration; but this work, though Aloni called it an opera, does not fit neatly into any category].
This very eclectic work is a different genre from all the others I have discussed. It interweaves traditional cantillation with musical theatre, folk, and jazz elements. It is scored for keyboards, flute, French horn, and two cellos. The keyboard part is not through-written, but meant to be improvised like jazz. Because of this, no two renditions of the score will ever be the same. This is true to some extent of any musical work, but in this case because the keyboard accompaniment must be improvised, it could potentially be totally different in each performance. There are no instrument notations in the piano score; the references I make are based on an audio tape (private recording, 1989).

Chapter 1

The work opens with the chorus (as narrator) singing the opening words of the Scroll (1.1) simultaneously with a spoken narration. The singing is done freely in a trope chant. The unusual element is the accompaniment: trope when used liturgically is always a capella.

Naomi continues with 1.8-9 (1.2-7 are omitted):

Figure 34: Aloni, “Go back my daughters,” p. I.2

Go back my daughters, go home. Return each to the home of her mother. May God show you kindness, for you have been kind, to the dead and to me.

God grant you your wishes, and rest you will find each in the home of her man.

Typically of most of Aloni’s translation, it stays quite close to the original text. Naomi does not address Ruth and Orpah as “daughters” here in the Scroll, but she does in a subsequent verse. The term “man” instead of “husband” is simply a more modern usage.

This aria is a syncopated, slightly jazzy tune, with rapid keyboard accompaniment. It starts in d minor and the word “home” is sung on d’, a note that continually returns. There is a single C major moment on “mother” (3rd staff, m.1).

The d’ seems to stand for the concept of home, as it sounds like the voice comes to rest briefly on it each time, even in the different tonalities. The single C major bar is significantly on “mother,” an even more positive ideal than “home.”

After this, a male chorus sings:

But they want to go with you, Go home to your people.

In an abrupt change of mood, the female chorus chants 1.10 in Hebrew. Then Naomi sings her song again, continuing on to 1.11-13; the female and then the male chorus echoes each of her lines as she concludes them. This effectively emphasizes everything Naomi sings:

Go back my daughters, return. Why should you come back with me? Have I still more sons in me for you to marry? I’m too old to wed and even if I did tonight, and gave
birth to more sons, could you wait for them, wait till they grew up. Could you wait for them and not marry before?

No my daughters more painful for me than for you. [Men's chorus sings under Naomi: It is painful, painful for her.] For God's hand is against me.

The words "Could you wait" are sung to the theme of Naomi's previous aria, but it is sung now in D major (p. 1.4, top). On the words "No my daughters" (4th staff), the voice ascends a fifth, "e-"', a change from all the previous descending fifths.

These small changes in key and ascending/descending intervals alert the listener to a subtle change in a character's mood or attitude. In this case, the positive musical changes seem to indicate a more assertive, if not necessarily more upbeat Naomi.

The female chorus chants 1.14 in trope (p. 1.5, 3rd staff); only the concluding phrase, "Ruth clung to her" (םָּשֶׁת הַרְפָּא), is sung to what will soon become Ruth's leitmotif, an ascending minor sixth, the sixth preceded by a leading tone (p. 1.5, 5th staff).

Ruth now sings "Don't ask me to leave you" (1.16-17):

Don't ask me to leave you, don't ask me to go back, I never want us to part. Where you go I will go, where you stay I will stay, you people are my people, Your God is mine. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Your people are my people, your God is mine. For death alone shall part us you and me. Where you go I will go, where you stay I will stay. Your people are my people, your God is mine.

There are only a few alterations in this text. "I never want us to part" is added, making Ruth's plea even stronger and supplying her with an explicit will of her own. The words "Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you" are replaced with the simpler "For death alone shall part us," which is not in the form of an oath as is the original text.

This simple melody in B-flat major is accompanied initially only by keyboard, in a "crystal" sound. Ruth's leitmotif appears on the words "Where you go" (p. 1.6, 3rd staff).

On the third reprise of the "Don't ask me" phrase, Naomi briefly sings her earlier song, "Go back my daughter," over Ruth's voice, doubled by a flute descant.

This could be heard as a final attempt at protest from Naomi, remaining unspoken.

On the final repeat of the "Where you go" g minor leitmotif phrase (p. 1.7, 2nd staff, m.3), the B flat becomes a B and the key is suddenly G major, with the melody doubled in French horn. This sudden and unexpected shift to a major tonality is underlined by the horn's repetition of the theme three times at the conclusion (4th staff, m.4).
The sudden intrusion of a G major chord has the effect of a radiant ray of light and hope bursting in. As if to confirm that hope, the repetition in the horn sounds out an affirmation of Ruth’s determination and hope.

The female chorus chants 1.19 in a mix of trope with jazz rhythms, accompanied on the final words by a flute descant. This is followed by spoken English narration, then Naomi’s solo “Don’t call me Naomi” (1.20-21). It is not an aria like Ruth’s, rather more of a chant or recitative, echoed by the male chorus (p. 1.9):

Don’t call me Naomi, call me Mara, for God has embittered me. I left full and God returned me empty. The Lord has tortured me, the Lord has hurt me. Don’t call me Naomi.

The sentiment is the same as the biblical text (1.20-21). Aloni translates some words in the final verse differently: he uses the more modern terms “tortured” and “hurt” for “dealt harshly” and “brought misfortune.”

Singing a melody that sounds like an earlier aria but in a higher key portrays a Naomi of greater intensity at this point. The lowering of pitch on “Mara” musically depicts bitterness, especially against the harshly dissonant D-flat against both her E-flat and the D she has just sung.

Chapter 2

A brief orchestral introduction opens the chapter, followed by the female chorus singing 2.1 in Hebrew, in a different trope mode than chapter 1.

The music to Ruth’s “Why have I found favor” (2.10; p. II.4, 6th staff, m.5) is an echo of the “Where you go” motif (the flat marked in the key signature on the final three staves is an error).

These musical connections help to establish personality and also to link all the action back to Ruth’s initial act of following Naomi.

When Ruth, speaking to Naomi, finally names Boaz (2.19; p. II.8, 6th staff), a harp is heard. When Ruth relates what Boaz said to her (2.21; the word “redeeming” is omitted from 2.20 and elsewhere), her leitmotif in the major key appears again, but with a higher starting note, g’ (p. II.9, m.4), followed by Naomi singing two ascending octave leaps, e’-f’ (2nd-3rd) staves). The leitmotif is heard again in its original key in the male chorus’s “It is good that you go with his maids” (2.22; p. II.9, 4th staff, m.3), which echoes Naomi’s words.

The sudden appearance of the harp alerts the listener to a new element in the story: Boaz. The mention of Boaz leads to the repetition of a familiar theme in a higher key, along with heightened emotion expressed in ascending octave jumps. The musical references to Ruth’s leitmotif serve as flashbacks and also predictions of the story’s positive outcome.

Chapter 3

After a brief spoken narrative, Naomi sings an aria (3.1-4; p. III.1, top). Her opening note is f’’’, though the rest of the aria lies in a lower range. The aria is in e aeolian.

The high starting note makes those opening words, “My daughter,” very dramatic.
When Ruth sings “Everything you say I will do” (3.5; p. III.2, m.4), the male chorus echoes Ruth’s words. “Everything Naomi says Ruth will do” (m.6). Then the female chorus chants verses 3.6 in a third trope variant (p. III.2, 3rd staff, m.3). The male chorus concludes the scene singing “Everything Naomi said Ruth has done” (p. III.3, top), thus skipping 3.7-8.

Boaz’s question “Who are you” (3.9; p. III.3, 2nd staff, m.3) is sung to an ascending seventh (c’-d”) followed by a descending fourth (to c”). Ruth sings “Will you spread” (p. III.3, 3rd staff) to a musical variant of her leitmotif: the second and third notes are reversed (becoming c’-c”-b”). The words “You are a kinsman” (“redeeming” is again omitted) are sung on an octave leap d”-d” which then ascends to e” (p. III.3, 4th staff). Boaz then sings verses 3.10-11, his last words “woman of valor” echoed by the male chorus (p. III.4, 2nd staff).

The unusual intervals in Boaz’s question create a sense of surprise. The variant of Ruth’s leitmotif sung here seems to show greater confidence, as the line goes straight to the sixth without a leading tone. Its presence here also recalls her pledge to Naomi. The octave leap in the voice indicates Ruth’s excitement as she tells Boaz of his relationship to her. The male chorus frequently echoes Boaz’s words throughout, musically showing his bond with other men.

The women sing the first part of 3.14 in trope, followed by Boaz, whose words are echoed by the male chorus (p. III.5). Boaz also sings 3.17, “Don’t go home to your mother-in-law empty.” a verse in the Scroll spoken by Ruth to Naomi, quoting Boaz’s words. After the female chorus chants 3.16 (p. III.5, 5th staff), Naomi sings verse 3.18. The words “my daughter” again start on f”#. as at the opening of this act, and the verse is sung to the same tune as that opening aria.

Chapter 4 The chapter opens with the female chorus narrating verses 4.1-2 to a fourth trope mode, the Ashkenazic, with a spoken English voice-over: this is interrupted twice by Boaz’s singing “Come sit here.” The music for 4.4-5 is quick and rhythmic, and on “Buy it” becomes more declamatory, emphasized by French horn (p. IV.2, 3rd staff). There are many major sixths in this section, a possible reference to Ruth’s leitmotif (p. IV.1, 5th-6th staves).

I am notifying you before the seated elders of my people. Buy it, redeem it, there’s no one to redeem it but you and I come after you.

When he speaks of Ruth and Naomi, the tempo slows and the tone of the music becomes gentler:

When you buy the land of Naomi you also buy from Ruth the widow and you will have to raise the name of the dead upon his land.

Only the male chorus sings verses 4.11-12, even though in the text it is “all the people.” The female chorus chants 4.13 (p. IV.4, 5th staff) and sings verse 4.14.

As in all other librettos, the reference to Perez and Tamar is deleted from 4.12, as is God’s role in Ruth’s conception.

The female chorus sustains the last word of 4.15, “sons,” on c” (p. IV.5, 4th staff, last measure), under which the male chorus sings 4.17 to Ruth’s leitmotif in the major key. They continue to repeat the leitmotif while the women sing out the names “Oved,” “Ishai,” and finally “David” on an open fifth c’-c” over the men’s voices. This creates a brief suspension between the B in the male chorus and the A in the female chorus, lasting only for an eighth note the first two times, but stretching to a quarter note on “David.” Only in this closing verse is the narration sung, rather than spoken, in English. Ruth’s leitmotif appears in the final
phrase in a much faster and rhythmic variation, ending in bright A major on the final word “David.”

This music creates a triumphant and upbeat conclusion. The sustained e" combined with the repetition of Ruth’s leitmotif and the almost shouted “Oved” and “Ishai” ending with “David” clearly shows the agenda of the composer to highlight David’s ancestry.

Summary

There is very little alteration to the biblical text. In a few places, Aloni substitutes words to modernize it or make it more relevant for modern listeners.

Aloni uses leitmotifs effectively, particularly that of Ruth. This leitmotif is first heard to the text “Ruth clung to her” (1.14; p. 200) and is woven throughout the remainder of the opera, often with the variant of a major rather than minor sixth interval, which is also the concluding passage of the whole work. This centers the story, through the musical leitmotif, on Ruth’s initial act of clinging to Naomi.

Using different musical styles for the choruses and the characters creates a dichotomy between the narration and the action; it is as if to say the story itself may be old, but the characters and dialogue are relevant for any age. In several scenes, the chorus echoes the words of the characters’ dialogues, a very effective dramatic device. The women’s chanting functions as a Greek chorus. It also grounds the story in its original context, by using Hebrew and traditional chant modes.
CONCLUSION

The librettos represented here re-fashion the Scroll in a variety of ways and degrees. These librettos are brought to life by the music to which they were meant to be sung. Just as the librettos are in several languages and styles, so too music is not a single language. Each composer represented here used a range of musical techniques to re-tell *Ruth*. The simplest devices—a drum roll, plangent clarinet call, sustained soft or loud high note, sudden key, meter, or tempo change, dissonance, resolved or unresolved chord—immediately establish a character’s feelings or the mood of a scene. Every technical musical device has a field of possible meanings, narrowed in each case by the libretto text, which determines which was the most likely intended effect. Each composer creates his own language with music’s tools, drawing on his cultural era’s use of those tools. While the music is playing and the characters are singing, the biblical book is brought to life, to a life it never had before. Characters love intensely, feel undercurrents of fear and anxiety, and ultimately praise God for bringing the story to a happy resolution.

The musical language sung by the characters is that of the composer, and there are vast differences among these composers. But in each work, the characters transcend their biblical source when they are singing, to become both intensely real and larger than reality. When they sing, their music tells us that Ruth, Naomi, Orpah, and Boaz had hopes and aspirations, they cried and laughed, they suffered and loved. They never really existed, but through music they will live forever.